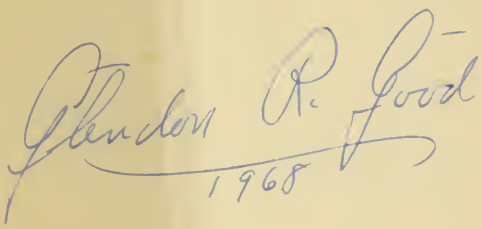
MARIE DRESSLER

MY OWN STORY


Glendon R. Good
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MARIE DRESSLER ON THE PORCH OF HER HOME IN BEVERLY HILLS

MARIE DRESSLER

MY OWN STORY

AS TOLD TO

MILDRED HARRINGTON

FOREWORD BY

WILL ROGERS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON 1934

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

GLENDON R. GOOD
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The Publishers express regret that this volume could not have appeared before the death of Marie Dressler who saw and approved the greater part of the manuscript but who was too ill either to read or give her approval of the final proofs.

Mildred Harrington has, however, acted throughout in compliance with the wishes of the author to whom she was devoted.

FOREWORD

A Radio Tribute by Will Rogers to Marie Dressler Just before Her Death on July 28, 1934

Marie Dressler is the real queen of our movies. And we can say that conscientiously, because she is. There's been nothing — nothing like her career has developed in our whole moving-picture industry; or the stage either, for that matter.

I've known her a good many years. She was a star with a theatre full of people applauding her before — when moving pictures — the only way you could move 'em was to turn the leaves of a family album. That's when she first was a star. She was a sensational musical-comedy star when your fathers and mothers had to get a marriage license to see Niagara Falls.

She could sing. She had a beautiful voice. In later life, she did the most wonderful burlesque opera. You know, singing with a kind of comedy voice. She could do it wonderfully because she had

such a wonderful voice. And she could do that better than any one. . . . She could dance in her younger days. And in addition, she could act; and she had a tremendous lot of a human quality about her in those days.

But, of course, like everything else, as the years mowed her down, there was nothing in her line on the stage any more. . . .

But she came out here. . . . All they wanted in those days was — just give us beauty, and — you know — give us plenty of beauty — and they couldn't come too young or too dumb. And she's the first one to come out and kind of do away with that whole theory. She started the whole new thing: that you didn't have to be so beautiful, and that you didn't have to be so young. . . .

She got a part with Greta Garbo in "Anna Christie" and was a sensation almost over night. . . . She didn't say — I was a star, I was this, I was that. For a start she wanted to take anything, and did take anything, and really won her way up just as though she had really never amounted to anything before in her life — which she had. . . . There never was a career — one time big and then clear down, and now up again — like hers. . . .

We'd often talked about doing a picture together. Every time I'd meet her, she'd say — when

are we going to do that picture together? I'd known her a good many years. And I'd say — well, I don't know. I'm going to as soon as I can git a chance. Gee, I did want to do one with her. . . . That would be the proudest moment of my life — my whole amusement career — to say that I'd worked with Marie. Oh, — she's — she's marvelous.

Marie Dressler has more friends among our real people of this country — I mean from the President on down. Why, she visited the White House, — regardless of political faith, or anything of that kind, she has entrée into places where none of us connected with the movies — where we couldn't get our nose in. . . . And that's all been done simply on a marvelous personality and a great heart.

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MY OWN STORY

Chapter

· I ·

WHEN a woman who admits to sixty-three starts digging about among her memories, she is bound to spade up a lot of strange things. People and events she herself never fully understood begin to take form and shape and meaning.

I was born homely. And for fifty years it has been my lot to make my living on the stage, where the first requisite for a woman's success is supposed to be a face that's easy on the eyes. I was born serious and I have earned my bread by making other people laugh.

Sometimes I think I have had more trouble and more joy and more fun than any woman alive.

All my life I've been a trouper. My earliest memories are of packing and moving, catching trains, settling down briefly, packing again. Home was simply where my mother was. Physically, the word

had no meaning for me until I was twenty-five years old and a Broadway success, able to provide a home for my family within commuting distance of New York.

As a child, I seldom lived more than a few months in any one place. Sometimes the months stretched into a year, but not often. I am told we paused long enough in Cobourg, Canada, for me to get born and be duly christened Leila von Koerber.

My father was the cause of our frequent moving.

I never liked my father and I sha'n't pretend that I did. In some respects, I was too much like him; in others, too little. This, I am convinced, is often the reason why a child fails to get along with one of his parents. And the tragedy of it is that when he comes to understand the reason, if ever, it is too late to do anything about it.

My father, Alexander von Koerber, was an Austrian by birth, but when he was barely old enough to remember the migration, his family moved over the boundary line into Germany. Even as a small boy, his soul was a battlefield on which two desires, two ambitions, fought for supremacy. One half of him demanded to be a soldier; the other half cried out to be a musician. At six he was put in

the military academy. While still in his 'teens he joined the German army and in its strict discipline grew to young manhood. But do not think that music had lost its hold on him. Somehow he found the time and the means to master the piano; to study the great composers.

From the first, love of change beat in his blood like a fever. Some will-o'-the-wisp was forever beckoning on his horizon. Before he was twenty, war broke out in the Crimea. *He had to go.* Slipping out of Germany, he made his way to England to enlist under the British flag. Soon he was an officer — a captain, I think. This was, I am sure, the happiest period of his life. His love of music flowered into composition and his regiment marched to the stirring impulse of his rhythms. Years later, he wrote a famous march for an eastern university.

When the war ended, he could not go back to Germany, for he was a deserter from the German army. His British comrades in arms invited him to settle down in England, but the idea of settling down anywhere was abhorrent to him. He began to dream of America, the young, the adventurous. Surely he could find the rainbow's end in this strong new country. I don't know whether he landed in the States or in Canada, but I do know

that for years he wandered about teaching music, playing at an occasional concert, — forever on the move.

It was in Canada that he met the girl who was to become my mother. Her name was Anne Henderson. She was the daughter of a well-to-do Irish-Canadian, who owned a string of trading stores, a fleet of sailing ships, and the finest racing stable in the Province of Ontario. Grandfather Henderson bitterly opposed the marriage of his delicately reared child to the penniless young music master with the dark brooding eyes, violent prejudices, and hair-trigger temper.

But with Anne, it was love at first sight, and love till "death do us part." Through the long years of poverty and suffering that followed, she apparently never for one moment regretted giving up a life of ease. Not once did she murmur or question Father's erratic decisions. To her he was a proud, misunderstood young prince; and her prince could do no wrong.

Music was his one passion. Among my earliest memories are those of crouching beside the stove in some tiny kitchen of one of the many houses we lived in, listening with Mother to the strains of Beethoven or Strauss, played with power and sweetness by my father, shut up in the parlor.

The parlor of whatever house we lived in belonged to Father; the kitchen to Mother and the children. I would no more have thought of stepping across the parlor threshold uninvited than I would have thought of chucking the grave young Episcopal minister under the chin when he came to call. But the warm, sweet-smelling kitchen was different. That was where Mother was. Bare and clean and friendly, it was my notion of heaven on a winter's night.

If ever there was an angel on earth, it was my little mother. Slight, never too well, she had the strength of ten lions when it came to fighting for her two children. Bonita was five years older than I, but by the time I was ten, I was larger than she, and I think I was born older.

Mother leaned on me; not on Bonita, who was soft and gentle and pretty. When moving time came, I was her right-hand man. Never shall I forget those naked, clean-swept little Canadian towns, one just like the other. Before I was twelve years old, I must have lived in fifty of them. The only thing Mother required of a new one was that it should have an Episcopal church, and that the church should have an organ.

Our procedure upon arriving in a new town became a sort of ritual.

Mother would shoo us off the train and into the station where, surrounded by our scanty household goods, we were ordered to wait while she went to look for a house. I was deputized to keep the family together during her absence. Father always spent the time moodily examining the piano. If the kitchen stove had lost a leg or a lid en route, he was completely indifferent, but if a single key of the piano jangled, or was the least bit out of tune, he was ready to demolish the whole railroad company. The worst of it was, he usually wanted to begin on an innocent station master or freight agent, if one happened to be at hand.

Fortunately, it never took Mother long to decide on a house. She never asked if the roof leaked or the chimneys drew properly. Her sole concern was to find a shelter as close as possible to the Episcopal church. The church, the minister, and God were the only stable things in her unstable life, — these, and her passionate devotion to her children, who she was determined should associate with the right people, presumably to be found only under the wing of the Episcopal church.

A house found, Mother would go at once to the minister and offer Father's services as organist. Then, having wangled in return a list of all the most prosperous families in town, she would set

forth to drum up trade for Father. But no sooner had he enrolled a class of young hopefuls, than he proceeded to insult them and their parents. In the middle of the third or fourth lesson, the parlor door would fly open and Father would stalk out, his great body quivering, his very mustache electric with rage.

"I can't teach that brat!" he would shout. "Dolt! Idiot!"

Two or three incidents of this kind were usually enough to start us packing again. Mother would patiently beg a letter of introduction to another rector and we would move to the next town and the next parish. Here, in a few weeks, or a few months, history would repeat itself.

Poor Father! He was his own worst enemy. I am sure that he was bitterly frustrated and unhappy. No doubt he had dreamed of a great career in the New World. And instead of brilliant triumphs on the concert stage, fate decreed that he should guide clumsy fingers through stupid scales.

I am certain it was from my father that I inherited many of the traits that have contributed to whatever success I have had. Surely from him I got my love of music — something that has afforded me the happiest moments I have ever spent. At times when food was scarce — and there have

been many such times in my topsy-turvy life — I didn't mind so much if I had a phonograph and a boxful of records in my room. To this day, music is my greatest solace. I would rather part with my bed than with my piano or my radio.

My friends accuse me of going *grande dame* on occasion. If I am guilty, I came by the weakness honestly. I always suspected that my father was accustomed to the authority of position, although he rarely spoke of his life in the old country. Years after his death, my suspicions were strengthened, if not confirmed.

I was traveling through Germany with my close friend, Hallie Phillips — Mrs. Robert Morris Phillips of New York City. While we were in Berlin, I felt an unaccountable urge to visit the tomb of the first Emperor William, in Charlottenburg, just outside the city.

As we stood there, looking down upon the effigy of that long-dead ruler, I got one of the major shocks of my life. There, lacking but the breath of life, lay my own father — the same sunken nostrils, the same finely shaped head and close-set ears, the identical arrogant, commanding brow.

Hallie noticed the family resemblance too.

"Look, Marie," she said; "you and William, there, have the same fighting chin!"

What it all meant I shall never know, for I did not try to trace the connection — if, indeed, there was one. But of this I am certain: the likeness between my father and the dead William was too startling to be accidental.

Of course, I might have shinned up a family tree and come down with a pedigree. I might even have discovered that I had the right to mark my silver with the faint worn crest I found on an old fish knife that had traveled with us through the years from one jumping-off place to another. Maybe it's just as well that I let well enough alone. I'm told a pawnbroker won't give you half as much on your silver if it's crested!

Peasant or patrician, my father's resentment against life took the form of hatred of his surroundings. He could hate harder than any man I ever saw. He hated Canada, he hated privations, and he hated his life as a music teacher. Sometimes I think he hated his children. One thing I know — my red hair is my own, but it was Alexander von Koerber who bequeathed me the T.N.T. that goes with it.

It was my mother who taught me the value of laughter. From her I learned that no trouble is so great, no life so dark or dull, that it cannot be relieved by a spark of real mirth. Her courage lifted

my childhood out of the sordid depths in which it might otherwise have been passed. Indeed, everything near her caught life and beauty from her radiant spirit. Whenever we moved to another town, there were always those who watched my mother's departure sorrowfully.

Looking back, I realize that she had gifts which, in other circumstances, might have made her successful in the world outside her home. She had an unerring sense of dramatic values and always brought out the best in every youngster who took part in the entertainments she directed for the church socials.

With true maternal finesse, she always managed to make places for Bonita and myself in the tableaux which were her special pride and joy. I remember one occasion on which I almost literally brought down the house for her. I was a three-year-old Cupid, posed on a pedestal. Just as the curtain started upward, Mother warned me on no account to move.

I didn't move, but the pedestal did!

Grimly I stuck to my post. Whereupon, clothed only in my pink birthday suit and clinging desperately to my little bow and arrow, I landed squarely in the lap of the town's greatest ladies' man and beau par excellence. No act of mine, be-

fore or since, has ever scored such tumultuous applause.

This, I might add, marked the beginning of my long career as a past mistress of the gentle art of falling. For years, wheedling producers approached me with the promise, "Say, Muree, I've got a swell part for you. You fall in every act!"

I think I must have been elected chairman of the entertainment committee at birth. My mother confessed that she had to smile when she first saw me. I was such a determined, pugnacious-looking mite. My father and the country doctor who officiated were not considerate enough to restrain themselves to a smile. They laughed.

That's what people have been doing ever since.

Well, thank God, I soon learned to be just as happy when folks said, "Isn't she funny!" as if they had ah-ed and oh-ed and exclaimed, "Isn't she beautiful!"

That's what they said of my sister Bonita, who was a pink-and-white Dresden doll. When Bonita and I, dressed in our best bibs and tuckers, sallied forth to Sunday school, in whatever little town we happened to be living at the moment, a dozen benevolent grown-ups would stop us between our house and the church to pat Bonita's head and coo, "My, isn't she lovely!" As they sometimes patted

my head too, I thought I was included in the compliment, and I glowed with happiness.

To this day, I contend that every woman has the right to feel beautiful, no matter how scrambled her features or how indifferent her figure. She needs this inward assurance to give her serenity, poise and power. It is her birthright. To all women between the ages of eight and eighty, who want to grow in beauty, here is my advice: Forget what your looking glass tells you, but say to yourself a dozen times a day, "I am beloved." No woman who actually believes that she is precious in the eyes of another can be entirely without charm.

Looking at Bonita with her dazzling skin, her big, dreamy eyes, and her smooth dusky curls, was like looking into a mirror. In my sister, I saw myself. I felt beautiful. It never occurred to me that I wasn't.

As usual, it was another woman who disillusioned me.

One afternoon when I was perhaps five, two ladies came to call. I was sent to entertain them while Mother dressed to receive company. When the callers began to fidget, I offered the family album for their diversion. They turned through its pages, exclaiming amiably at its contents, which

consisted almost entirely of poses of my sister Bonita and a cousin who lived much of the time with us. One of the numerous photographs showed the two little beauties, decked out in fur tippets and muffs, standing with the rope of what was presumably a sled in their hands. The sled itself was not visible. I beamed with pride at the compliments which greeted this dashing group.

Finally, one of the ladies turned to me and said kindly, "And where were *you,* my dear?"

I said carelessly, "Oh, I was sitting on the sled."

And, believe it or not, that was the first time it had ever occurred to me that I was conspicuous by my absence in the family album!

Not long ago, a bright young newspaperman approached me with a request for one of my baby pictures.

"Young man," I said sadly, "I never owned a picture of myself until I was old enough to pay the photographer!"

He didn't believe me, but I had told him the literal truth.

Not long after the album episode, I learned that I had a gift for provoking people to laughter. Somehow I knew instinctively that people like to laugh, that they are grateful to you for making them laugh. Even then, I fear I craved the spot-

light and applause. Consciously, or unconsciously, we all want approval. It is a basic need of the human heart.

I was born with a terrific urge to please people, to make them happy. Only when others are happy can I be happy too.

To my ears there is no music quite like the music of happy laughter. As a child, I was always trying to beguile Mother into laughing. I would mimic the fat, floury-handed baker, the pompous postmaster, the near-sighted minister in his pulpit — anything to bring a smile to Mother's anxious face.

At first I did not extend my efforts beyond the family circle. But there came a day that was to leave its mark on my future, when I was to find the laughter of my public balm to my wounded vanity. I remember it all as clearly as if it were yesterday.

Bonita and I had gone to a party in all the glory of starched organdy and blue sashes contrived out of Mother's best summer silk. We played "spin the plate." Bonita's turn came first. She stepped up like the little lady she was and gave a flawless performance. A subdued murmur of admiration followed her back to her chair.

It was my turn next. Teeth gritted, jaw set, I grasped the plate in a hot little paw and advanced

with a determined stride toward the center of the room. I would do as well as Bonita or die in the attempt. Halfway to my goal, I tripped on a rug and fell sprawling. A roar of laughter greeted my downfall.

Even while I burned with shame, I liked that laughter. They were having a good time because of me. As I lay there flat on my back, with my heels all tangled up in my sash, I made a momentous discovery: It was pleasanter to have folks laugh at you than to have them ignore you. Very well then, I would give them something to laugh at. From that moment on, I deliberately began to imitate a yearling in a china shop. And I basked in the sunshine of the laughter and attention I drew.

So, you see, it was lack of beauty that drove me to clowning, and it was clowning that eventually put me on the stage. I firmly believe that I owe whatever good fortune has come my way largely to the fact that I was born without a pretty face. Sour grapes? Not on your life! I can admire another woman's beauty with all the detachment of a Cook's tourist beholding the Coliseum by moonlight. It's grand. But thank the Lord I don't have to live up to it all the time.

Take my word for it, homely women have a

much easier time of it than the beauties. I have a downright reverence for a strikingly handsome woman who accomplishes anything in this world. She has to overcome an almost insuperable handicap before she can really get under way. People gape at her, at her success, and shrug, "Of course, with a face like that — "

Even in the matter of bagging a husband, I sometimes think the beauties come out at the short end of the horn.

Think back a moment. What about the beauties you have known? In each of the dozens of towns in which I lived as a child, there was always a girl who by reason of her lovely face and figure could have had any man in the place. But the very assurance that she had only to lift a finger made her put off choosing and settling down. She wanted men; not a man. And the irony of it was that often her reluctance to give up her position as a reigning belle gave the other girls in town a chance which they might otherwise have missed. The beauty worked the men up to the marrying point, and when she turned them down, they promptly marched up to the altar with somebody else. Nine times out of ten, when the smoke of battle cleared, she who had queened it for years found that she had to take second, or third best, or become that

hateful thing, an old maid. Oh, no, it's not the beauties who land the prize husbands!

But I'm getting ahead of my story.

As I've told you, it was for my mother that I first played the clown. No applause has ever been sweeter to me than her sudden gay smile. Poor lamb, she had enough to give her a chronic case of the blues. My father was never at any time able to earn a decent living for us. Eventually, he became so bitter that he wouldn't even try. It was this, I think, and not his outbursts of temper, that killed the affection I might have had for him.

I resented seeing my mother's thin back bent with the labor of keeping two healthy youngsters fed and clothed and housed. I resented seeing her cook for the boarders she was forced to take into our home.

Grandfather Henderson's disapproval of my father caused him to withhold any financial assistance he might otherwise have given us during these years of struggle. Although his door remained open to her and her children, he refused to help out with money as long as Mother stubbornly remained with Father. I think my grandfather might have relented eventually, had it not been for a tragic

incident which occurred about the time Bonita was twelve and I seven.

Grandfather's greatest pride was in his fine stables. Next to his race horses, he loved a perfectly matched pair of carriage horses. Grandmother tried hard to share his enthusiasm, but she had an innate and deathly fear of horses.

One night Grandfather returned from Montreal, bringing with him a handsome pair of chestnuts which he intended driving tandem to a light cart. The next morning, he drove up to the front door with a flourish to exhibit his new beauties to Grandmother. Nothing would do but that she must share his first drive with him. Hiding her fear, she put on her prettiest bonnet and allowed herself to be lifted into the high seat of the cart.

Grandmother did not return alive from that outing. Just as they started to cross a bridge, the horses shied at the sudden downward swoop of a bird. Grandmother was thrown out of the cart and instantly killed.

For months Grandfather brooded over his loss. More than once he had to be restrained from self-destruction. Then, suddenly and inexplicably, he married his housekeeper. This woman, my step-grandmother, exerted a strong influence over him. She was determined that none of his money should

go to my mother. She never lost an opportunity to add fuel to the flame of his hatred for my father.

But for all his dislike of the man my mother had married, Grandfather intended that she should have a proper share of his fortune upon his death. Unfortunately, he left her share in property rather than in money. Her inheritance consisted of a small fleet of merchant vessels. But during a terrible storm, when all the ships had put into dock, they caught fire and burned. And along with them, my mother's hopes of some day being able to do something for her children went up in smoke, since they were not insured.

Chapter

· II ·

TO the temperament of the born artist, my father added the temper of the spoiled aristocrat. I seemed to have been born with a genius for arousing his ire. As a child, I was deathly afraid of him. And as I grew older and more like him, life became a succession of clashes between his will and mine.

To begin with, my homeliness was an offence to his fastidious love of the beautiful. Not only did I lack beauty, but I also lacked the pretty graces ordinarily attributed to little girls. Father belonged to a generation which expected a girl child to be a miniature lady; not a tomboy who could outjump, out-yell, and out-fight every boy in the neighborhood.

Bonita was the beloved of his heart. I understood how he felt about her. It never occurred to

me to blame him for showing that she was his favorite. I adored Bonita too, but I did not like to play with her.

She was something to cherish and admire, yes. But she was not much fun as a playmate, for she always had her ruffles and her curls to consider. If I had been allowed to crop my hair close and dress in a pair of Father's old pants cut down to scale, my joy would have been complete. I chose to play with boys and I would rather have died than be called a "sissy." It was my proud boast that I never refused a dare. Of course, I was always in hot water.

The toughest boy in the neighborhood was no quicker to act upon a challenge than Leila von Koerber. Whether I was victorious or unsuccessful in the enterprise at hand, I usually faced retribution at home. Father had little sympathy for ditch-jumping, tree-climbing, bareback riding, or any of the other pursuits which engaged my playtime hours.

Even on Sundays I could not play lady.

On a certain Sabbath, elegantly clad in black velveteen, I sauntered forth with Bonita, determined for once to behave with modesty and proper feminine decorum. Halfway down the street we encountered a group of my week-day friends —

freckled-faced boys with mischievous eyes and busy tongues. As we passed, they called out:

"Leila's in satin,
Leila's in lace —
Leila's afraid she'll get
Mud on her face. . . ."

I lifted my chin and stalked on without answering their taunts. But rage burned in my heart. I could lick any one of them single-handed if it weren't for the velveteen dress — and they knew it. Presently we came to a muddy ditch. The boys had followed us. One of them eyed my Sunday finery disdainfully.

"Bet you don't dare jump across the ditch with that thing on," he challenged.

Before Bonita could utter a word of restraint, I darted to the edge of the chasm. My aim was free, wide and handsome; my skirt, alas, was narrow. I landed on my face just where the ditch was deepest and blackest and muddiest.

While the boys on the embankment danced in glee and Bonita screamed her horror, I extricated myself from the slimy depths of that dreadful hole. Dripping and forlorn, I made my way home, hoping desperately that I might steal into the house and get to my own room without encountering

Father. With all the caution of a burglar on prowl, I crept up the back steps. But fate was against me. There in the doorway, his figure drawn up to its last imposing inch, his eyes grim with distaste, stood Father. Ignominiously I decided upon flight and hiding. Rushing past him, I plunged upstairs and dove under the company bed. A button on the back of my frock must have caught in the bed ticking. At any rate, there was a horrible ripping sound and I was deluged with goose feathers. They filled my mouth and nose and ears. They tickled abominably. I sneezed and feathers filled the air.

When Father, armed with the switch of paternal justice, finally managed to drag me forth from what I fondly conceived to be a hiding place, I must have looked like something the Ku Klux Klan had discarded. The scene that followed was probably funny, but nobody thought so at the moment.

Every time Father's switch came down, he stirred up a cloud of feathers. I sneezed and he sneezed. Mother came running in to act as intermediary and she sneezed. When Father had finished showing me what happens to little girls who accept "dares" on Sunday, Mother led us both to the back porch, where she proceeded to retrieve as many feathers as possible for her company tick.

Father submitted glumly to the plucking, but I rather liked it, and was persuaded only by pleading looks from Mother to desist from making appropriate barnyard noises.

I was not at all chastened by this experience. Indeed, I spent the rest of Sunday afternoon eagerly looking forward to Monday and a hand-to-hand encounter with my comrades who had betrayed me into making a fool of myself. But when Monday came, bringing with it a chance to even up the score, those wily boys had cooked up a grand scheme for a circus in which I was to walk the tight rope. If I paid them off as they deserved, they would leave me out of the circus. I couldn't bear that, so I did what women have been doing since the beginning of time: I pretended that nothing had happened. And the boys did what men have been doing since the beginning of time: they actually forgot that anything had happened and glowed with magnanimity because they had given me the stellar rôle in the show.

My most frequent companions in crime were two boy cousins whose inclinations were as uncivilized as my own. Together the three of us climbed the roofs of barns and waged war on the neighbor youngsters from a chicken-coop barricade. Our favorite enemy was a heavy, dull boy who lived

near by. He was an only child and had been reared tenderly. His name, I remember, was Andrew. Poor Andrew! He longed to break the string which attached him to his mother's apron and join my cousins and myself, the desperadoes of the community. But even if his mother had let him out of her sight, we would have scorned such a mean-spirited comrade.

Just a little above the town we lived in at this time ran a small river — deep enough for swimming and rowboat traffic. We had no rowboats, but my cousin Ned was an ingenious lad. Under his direction we constructed flat rafts from the limbs of fallen trees. Soon we had a navy as well as an army and carried on our warfare up and down the little stream.

Andrew would watch us jealously from the river bank. He begged us to sell him one of our craft. Ned and Bill and I went into a huddle. We agreed to sell Andrew a handsome raft for a nickel. His gratitude was touching. When we turned his property over to him the following morning, he expressed his thanks volubly.

Ned and Bill and I sat on the river bank and watched Andrew pole away from the shore. The deal completed to his satisfaction, he was swaggering a little.

"I'll show you how to make these things go," he shouted, as he plunged his pole into the watery depths.

We looked at one another and grinned.

Andrew was going, all right, but he was going the wrong way. The raft was sinking instead of moving along the surface of the water. Poor Andrew was already ankle-deep in water and rapidly growing panic-stricken.

"Show us how to make it go!" we shouted. "Show us!"

The river was not deep enough to be dangerous, but discretion prompted us to wade into the water and rescue the blubbering Andrew, who by this time was shrieking with terror and rage. We delivered him, dripping and sobbing, to his mother. In ten minutes she had spread the report that the Von Koerber girl and her gang had tried to drown her son. News of our latest and most daring escapade soon reached Father's ears. He examined the raft and found the hole Ned had bored through its flat bottom before the sale. My cousins were sent home in disgrace — and I was forbidden to play with them for a week.

This punishment would have been unbearable if it hadn't been for my dogs. I loved dogs even more than I loved boys.

As far back as I can remember, I always had some stray canine of uncertain lineage to share my fortunes and misfortunes. Mother loved animals herself and laid no restriction upon the number of four-footed friends I brought home to live on the back porch. But to Father, a flurry of barking, or a dolorous howl let loose in the middle of the night, was a signal for a storm at the breakfast table.

"Get rid of that beast to-day," he would order, with a bang of his fist that almost made the cups jump out of their saucers.

Pleading was no good. I knew that. But occasionally I resorted to strategy.

Once I fell from the roof and all but broke my neck in an attempt to save the life of one of my dogs. I can see him now. He was a little fellow with wistful eyes like an old man who has lived too long, and a silky coat that felt soft against my face. I called him Pokey because he was forever nosing this and that. I adored Pokey and he adored me. There was not an atom of meanness in his nature, but like all dogs, he resented being teased when he was eating.

There was a boy in the neighborhood who took pleasure in tormenting dogs. The smaller they were, the better he liked it, for he thought himself safe

in subjecting them to every possible indignity. His favorite amusement was to snatch away a piece of food just as Pokey was about to devour it. I warned him against this form of entertainment, but he never paid any attention to me. One day he snatched once too often. Pokey's forbearance gave out and he bit the hand that baited him.

Howling to heaven that he had been bitten by a mad dog, the little rascal made off for home as fast as his legs could carry him. In a few minutes the whole neighborhood was in an uproar. Men, women, and children joined in a search for my pet, who was immediately branded "a dangerous animal that ought to be shot." Father was one of the first to join the searching party. Meanwhile I, who had witnessed the whole thing from my bedroom window, had gone down and fetched Pokey up before the rabble bent upon his destruction could gather in our back yard.

For fear that I should be discovered if I remained in my room, I climbed out of a second-story window and crouched on the sloping roof, Pokey clasped tightly in my arms. Always possessed of more force than grace, I slipped and rolled from the roof, still clutching Pokey to my bosom.

The posse of dog hunters caught sight of me and advanced upon us, but I was too quick for them.

With all the speed in my sturdy young body, I turned and fled down the street and around a corner, while they were still debating about which direction I had taken. On the other side of the town lived an old woman who loved dogs. To her I confided Pokey. I was sad to part with him, but relieved to know that he was safe from his enemies — and mine.

From that day on, I brought no more dogs home. I continued, however, to get into one scrape after another. But if I was mischievous, I was also observant.

I was barely thirteen when I openly rebelled at the sight of Mother slaving her life away in an effort to keep a roof over our heads and food in our stomachs. She was little and frail; I was so big and strong I could have lifted her in my arms. That is what I wanted to do. With all the fierce ardor of youth, I longed to take care of her, to lift her free of work and worry, make life easy and pleasant for her.

To talk to Father was worse than useless. He sat all day in the parlor, cursing the world and taking melancholy comfort in Beethoven. All that he could compass was that his own life was a failure; that he was frustrated and miserable. The toil-worn look that was gradually replacing Mother's

soft prettiness was outside the range of his vision. He had never looked at her with the eyes of understanding, and now I doubt if he actually saw her at all. She had become a pair of hands to minister to him; a gentle voice to soothe away his increasingly frequent fits of despondency.

There was only one way in which I could help Mother. That was to get a job and bring home money to lift her burden a little. Without consulting any one, I went job-hunting. I found work in the biggest store in town. My elation was almost painful. I felt independent, powerful. Before I reported for my first day's work, I had already spent every cent of my first week's salary — mentally.

It was a good thing that I confined my spending to imaginary splurging, for my job was doomed to be short-lived. A day and a half after I had proudly taken my place behind the underwear counter, I was advised in no uncertain terms that the firm could and would dispense with my services. Brokenhearted, I demanded to know wherein I had failed. And when I learned the truth, even my valiant spirit was daunted.

In my eagerness and confusion, I had wrapped a pair of men's red flannel drawers in a package destined for the primmest old maid in town. I can see her still, a thin, gaunt old woman, shaking an

umbrella in my face as she explained that she found the enclosed lingerie not quite to her taste.

My employer would not let me remain long enough to prove that I could improve. Richer only in experience, I moved on down the street in search of another job. But news of my unfortunate *faux pas* had preceded me. Nobody was willing to take a chance on my services.

Perhaps it was just as well, for I could never have given my soul to clerking.

A far more glamorous dream absorbed me. I longed to be a lady chariot driver in a circus. A few months after my clerking experience, I paid a visit to relatives in a village where a small wagon show was wintering. With wide eyes and an envious heart, I hung about the black cook wagon and the training performers. Timidly, I confided to my new-found friends my ambition to join the circus.

"The boss won't take you," they told me, "unless you know how to ride."

But this was no argument to discourage a horsewoman of my caliber. All one summer I had ridden bareback on my Grandfather Henderson's farm. I felt equipped to begin my circus training in earnest. A good-natured equestrienne took me in hand. She fastened one end of a rope about my waist; the other she secured to the regulation pole.

When I fell off the horse — which was often in the beginning — I remained suspended in air.

In less than a week I could stand proudly erect on the back of a prancing steed. I am sure I could still do it, if I had to!

Luckily, at this point, I was diverted from my circus ambitions. The great Emma Nevada, then in the heyday of her glory as a prima donna, had a brother who owned a cheap dramatic stock company. Nevada recruited his company as he went along. I had heard that he hired actors occasionally and when I saw his advertisement in our town paper, I sat down and wrote him a twenty-page letter stating that I had played leads extensively, but neglecting to add that most of my performances had taken place in Sunday school, and that the rôles had been assigned me by my doting mother.

Evidently the great man was properly impressed, for not only did he engage me, sight unseen, but he also hired my sister, Bonita, whose talents I had generously extolled along with my own. Thus, at the tender age of fourteen, I counted myself ready to set forth and conquer the world.

The funny part of it is, I was so tall and well-developed that later, when they saw me, neither Nevada nor my fellow players questioned my

bland declaration that I was eighteen. I suppose mine is the only case on record in which an actress actually overstated her age! The truth is, I not only looked eighteen, but I felt and talked and thought like a woman of forty. Life had forced me into an early maturity.

With Nevada's acceptance in my hand, I faced the ordeal of breaking the news to Father.

We quarreled — a bitter exchange of words that served to strengthen my young resentment of him. Even then I was struck by the unfairness of his attitude. He was ready and eager to take advantage of his authority as a parent, although he had long overlooked the responsibilities attached to parenthood.

"You'll never drag the name of Von Koerber through the mud by showing off behind the footlights!" he thundered.

"I'll take another name!" I thundered back at him.

It was my temper against his. Eventually he must have recognized in me his own stubbornness, for he gave in, and I became Marie Dressler, after an aunt whose name the family did not seem to feel was as sacred as that of Von Koerber.

And so I started out, unschooled and rawboned, to win fame and fortune. I had become a trouper,

and my trouping was to extend over half a century of years and two continents of space. During those years I was to be educated by life. Were I to choose again between academic schooling and learning from life, I would not hesitate. It mattered not that I had spent less time in classrooms than out of them. My mother had laid the foundation for the lessons I was to learn later.

It is not that I do not reverence erudition and the culture that comes from study. I do. I have the deepest respect for men and women of learning — provided they have not neglected life's lessons for those of books.

My friend, Wallace Beery, had perhaps as little formal schooling as I. Yet it is my contention that Wally is a well-educated man, though he'd deny the allegation himself.

"They kept me in the fourth grade two years," he'll tell you lazily. "And I'd be sittin' right there to-day, if I hadn't walked out on them!"

No doubt Nevada's company was a strange school to which to commit a youngster of fourteen. Certainly no child bound for boarding school ever set off with more admonitions than Bonita and I, when we left home to go on the stage.

If Father was difficult, Mother made everything as easy as possible. I left home with her blessing —

and advice. Upon the eve of our departure, we sat up late, Mother, Bonita, and I, in the cosy little kitchen which was our part of the house. She was ambitious for us and hid her tears and fears beneath a smile. During that last hour before going up to bed, she imparted to me a bit of wisdom which has stayed with me to this day.

"Darling," she said, "make everything count. Fill your head with knowledge and hold it high. If you can do nothing else for yourself, you can at least read the newspaper every morning. That alone will keep you from ignorance."

Her advice became my habit. For fifty years I have not once neglected reading the daily paper if I could lay my hands on one.

The plans for our leave-taking aroused great excitement in our little world. A strange assortment of gifts poured into our home. One of the gifts, I recall, was a piece of lumber which my father promptly converted into a trunk, that looked more like a dog house than a piece of luggage. In those days anybody with a ticket could check a house and lot and call it a trunk if he wanted to.

By the time we reached our first stop, we had become so worldly-minded that we gave our white elephant to a boarding-house keeper who said she

had always yearned for a summer house. We left her trying to train ivy up its rugged sides!

As soon as I found I was the leading lady of a company of eleven, in which the manager, as well as everybody else, acted at least three rôles during a performance, acquired a "grip" which I refused to entrust to the tender mercies of baggage men, for I felt that in my hand it would proclaim to the world as no other insignia could, "Here goes an actress!"

The first part that Nevada shoved into my trembling hand was the character of *Cigarette* in "Under Two Flags." And there began a battle that has raged throughout my life, — my dogged, never-ending fight against stage fright so dreadful, so devastating, that it often leaves me limp and nauseated. To this day, I can't walk on a set for a two-minute shot that my palms aren't cold and wet and my back crawling with terror.

And fifty years ago — well, I can only tell you that after Nevada had gone to his own quarters, I sat until dawn in my room in a dingy little hotel, seeing only the dancing figures on the dreadful wallpaper and my own doom. *I simply could not face those people out in front!*

And yet, the next night I did face them, — and loved it!

Once actually on the stage, I become a different person. I burn with a strange zest which the audience gives me, and which I want to give back to them, full measure and heaping over. From that far-away day to this, whenever I face a theater full of people, I say to myself, "Here are folks — many of them like me when I used to save and save to see a show. A lot of them are none too happy. They want to laugh and forget. It is my job to help them." And in trying to help them forget, I forget my own tremors.

Chapter

· III ·

EVERYTHING about my new life fascinated me. I was too excited to be homesick. Too eager for experiment. Sooner or later, of course, I was bound to get into trouble.

My admiration for my fellow players was unbounded. They were "professionals"; I was a rank beginner. I admitted this to myself, but I went to extraordinary pains to conceal it from the rest of the company. I was constantly appealing to Bonita, "My dear, where did I play *Lady Macbeth* first? Was it in Cobourg, or that nice town just beyond Ottawa?"

At any rate, my knowledge of geography was convincing. Our constant moving about made it easy for me to rattle off impressive statistics about the population of this or that provincial center. If we had lived in a town too recently, I discour-

aged Nevada from making a stop there for fear that the truth about my age would creep out. "Oh, that burg," I would say disdainfully; "they won't stand for anything more dramatic than church tableaux!"

It was months before it dawned on me that a company like ours, playing only in small towns and to unsophisticated audiences, was bound to be made up of lusty neophytes like Bonita and myself and broken-down oldsters who could no longer get engagements where even second-rate ability was required.

The burden of the show, in an organization such as ours, was usually carried by a youngish leading man with a profile and a bag full of cheap theatrical tricks. Nevada's company was no exception to the rule. Our leading man was a dashing chap ten or fifteen years my senior. His dark good looks, pleasantly tinctured with worldly cynicism, made him in my romantic eyes the *beau ideal.* His deference, his slightly weary chivalry, as exemplified in the rôles he played opposite me, could have but one result: I fell in love with him. And when I say *fell,* I mean just that. There is nothing so headlong, so devastatingly complete, as the first falling in love of a young girl who all her life has been a tomboy.

Up to this time, boys had been to me more agreeably adventurous playmates than girls. That was all. I had gone through none of the puppy-love agonies familiar to most adolescents. In the first place, we seldom lingered in one spot long enough to foster attachments of the heart. In the second, as I have perhaps already suggested, at no age is the male of the species prone to wax romantic over a female who is likely to reply to a tender speech with a sock in the eye.

But now, overnight, everything had changed.

As leading woman of Nevada's company, the very feminine wiles which I had despised had become part of my stock in trade. I was eager to try out my allure on all comers. It was thrilling beyond dreams to have our handsome Romeo whisper words of love in my ear, even though I knew the words were written by a man long dead for a girl who had never existed in flesh and blood. Small wonder that I soon confused my stage emotions with my personal ones! Especially when my hero began to crib the cream of his lines for strictly private performances.

It must have been great fun to make love to me. I was so pathetically easy. So breathless with the shock and wonder of it all. Terrence — I do not remember his last name — probably did not realize

what a heady compliment he paid me in remaining apparently oblivious to Bonita's apple-blossom beauty; in ignoring the mature charms of the character actresses. I began to feel like Cleopatra and Helen of Troy rolled into one. Courageously I faced the fact that I was a dangerous woman. I made up my mind not to misuse my power. I would be tender and true forever and ever, amen!

When I played opposite Terry on the shabby little stages which fell to the lot of a company like ours, I was not acting. I was living. With my whole soul I responded to his endearments and languishing glances. At night, when the show was over and I lay in bed beside the placid Bonita, I would relive in dreams every tender moment of our make-believe passion before the footlights.

One glorious, never-to-be-forgotten evening, Terry invited me to have supper with him after the show. In a frenzy of ecstasy, I rummaged through my wardrobe and Bonita's for attire worthy of this occasion. I knew that I was no beauty, but the wavering mirror above my make-up shelf showed me that love can work miracles in a woman's face. Gazing raptly at my radiant self, I fully expected Terry to declare himself.

He did, but there was no mention of a wedding ring.

I did not suspect that it was my hero's habit to make a conquest of every new girl who joined the troupe. I only knew that he was handsome and divinely tender and that my heart was ready to burst with happiness. Remember, this was the springtime of my life — poignant now with the sweet poetry which is part and parcel of youth.

Even to-day, across a span of half a century, I could weep for that child with a woman's body who was the Marie Dressler of fifty years ago.

My awakening came suddenly. The blow was swift, but the wound was long in healing. I think I still carry the scar somewhere at the bottom of my heart.

In the language of the melodramas we played nightly, the villain did not "betray" me. Nothing so conclusive and clean-cut as that. But it wasn't my fault that this was not the case. Looking back upon my almost incredible innocence and inexperience, I think it might have been easier if he had "wronged" me. Then I could have hated him with a vengeance.

But I hadn't this satisfaction. I could only agonize and blame myself for his defection. Surely in some way I had failed him. It did not occur to me that any woman who ceases to be a novelty fails a philandering male of Terry's type. This is

BIRTHPLACE IN COBURG, CANADA AND BEVERLY HILLS
HOME OF THE BELOVED SCREEN STAR

what happened: In one of the little tank-water towns that comprised our tour, Nevada took on a new girl. Immediately Terry lost interest in me. I was an old story; here was a new one. I had to stand by and watch the light that had shone in his eyes for me alone glow now for the newcomer. I longed to crawl into Mother's arms and weep out my misery. But Mother was three hundred miles away.

Meanwhile, I still played opposite Terry. It was now, perhaps, that I began to be an actress, wearing smiles that found no echo in my heart, mouthing lines that had become meaningless. Nor was it any consolation to me when the new love was replaced by another. I wept for my successor as I had wept for myself. Too early I had discovered that man can be fickle and woman can make the best of it.

Pride kept me from deserting Nevada's company. I determined to become such a great actress that even the faithless Terry would recognize my ability and regret his inconstancy. I poured all my young energy into the memorizing of lines, the perfecting of "business." Nevada, hard-boiled manager of a third-rate troupe, was moved to compliment me.

"You keep on working like this, kid," he told me, "and you'll get there!"

Gradually my self-confidence returned. By the time Terry dropped out of the company (at the urgent invitation of Nevada, who grew restive when his leading man extended his Don Juan activities to the ladies of the audience), I had already seen how shabby and shopworn were the charms with which he had wooed me and those who had followed me. I saw something else: I saw that Terry was only a ham actor, while I was some day going to be a star in a first-class stock company. My hurt had changed into shame that I had been so easily taken in.

At the end of six months, I felt myself a full-fledged actress. I knew that I had worlds to learn, but I was now a professional. Magic word! Miraculous fact! It gratified my vanity to have people point me out on the street and in the drab boarding houses we were forced to patronize, as "the leading lady in Mr. Nevada's show." If our landlady, or anybody else, approached me for a pass to the theater, I felt at the very least like a queen dispensing land grants.

I was on my way to the theater one evening when a ragged boy came up to me and touched my sleeve. He had an owl tucked in the crook of his arm. "Say, lady," he stammered, "I'll swap my owl for a ticket to your show."

I was about to say a positive, "No, thank you," when he added apologetically, " 'Course, it's wing's hurt a little."

Then, as now, I could not resist the temptation to mother an injured creature, human or animal. I hurried into the theater, wangled a ticket out of Nevada, and returned to the boy and the owl. The bird became my property on the spot. I named it Solomon and set about curing its wing. In no time Solomon and I were as inseparable as Jimmy Durante and his nose.

My fellow players failed to share my enthusiasm for Solomon. They insisted that his mournful "Hoo, hoo!" in the wings was enough to bring bad luck down upon us. Even Bonita, to whom half of my room belonged, disliked my pet and begged me to part with him.

"That blinking bird gives me the creeps," she declared.

But I was obstinate. I probably would have clung to Solomon until death claimed him if he, too, had not deserted me for another.

We were stowing the props one night — everybody lent a hand after a performance — when some one discovered that Solomon was missing. Immediately we dropped everything. The whole troupe scurried about, looking high and low for that miser-

able bird. News of my bereavement spread to the townspeople, and a delegation of citizens, headed by the mayor himself, joined in the search.

We were about to give up in despair when a boy rushed in with the glad tidings, "Say, lady, I found your owl!"

Actors and citizens followed the boy to a lawyer's office over the post office. Here we found the wandering Solomon making desperate love to a stuffed lady owl that graced the top of the lawyer's bookcase.

My fellow troupers were all for tearing Solomon from his lady love's arms. But I was firm. If Solomon preferred a stuffed bird to me, he could have her and welcome! I had learned my lesson, you see. No more hanging on to those who wanted to be free.

Nevada's company proved a wonderful school in many ways. Often a bill was changed on an hour's notice or less. Every member of the cast had to be a quick study. I have gone on in a part which I had only read over hastily while dressing, more intensive study being pursued while I waited in the wings for my cue. In the old roving days of fifty years ago, an actor was judged largely by his skill in "ad libbing." If they had a sketchy outline of the plot and a rough idea of the characterization,

a troupe of old hands could almost create a play as they went along. This was fun if everybody played ball. It was ghastly if somebody fumbled or "went dead."

Lillian Russell was one of the most gifted "ad libbers" I have ever met. Years after the Nevada experience, when she and I were playing together, we used to introduce a new scene every evening. Occasionally Lillian and I were so amused by the frantic efforts of the rest of the cast to follow us that we dissolved into helpless laughter and let them carry on as best they could. More often, though, our fellow players would give up the struggle to keep up with us and surrender the stage to La Russell and me. The audience soon caught on and wildly applauded our improvisations.

Not only was I forced, while touring with Nevada, to master many tricks of the profession, which later stood me in good stead, but I also found countless opportunities for observing life in the raw. From boarding-house and hotel keepers, from waitresses, train conductors, and my fellow passengers and boarders, I learned to read human nature. And I taught myself to turn my observations to my own uses. Many a woman who shared my boarding-house prunes and corned beef in one

town would have been surprised to see herself on the stage in the next.

On the whole, I think theatrical people are inclined to stick too closely together off the stage. They talk, eat, and sleep theater. If they have a holiday, they rush to the theater to watch somebody else act. It is well enough to be interested in one's profession, but to restrict one's leisure to association with the members of one's own guild, so to speak, is to be doomed to artificiality and eventually to sterility. In order to represent life on the stage, we must rub elbows with life, live ourselves. Of course, this is true of any creative art. The writer cannot shut himself in a dungeon to write, nor can the painter blindfold himself if he wants to paint.

My own contacts with life in those early days were sometimes painful, as in the case of Terry. Oftener they were amusing. Of course we were always "on the road." I remember once we landed in a little sagebrush town in Texas, half starved, not because we hadn't money enough to buy food — though, heaven knows, we had precious little cash at any time — but because there had been no food to buy along the way. No sooner had the engine jerked to a standstill than the younger members of the company piled out like a lot of calves suddenly

let out of the corral. Helter-skelter we started down the track toward the boxlike depot. Just back of the station was a lunch wagon. I discovered it first.

"Hi, Indians, come on!" I yelled over my shoulder to the girls who were manfully trying to keep up with my long strides, "I smell fried eggs!" With a series of whoops that would have done credit to a band of Sioux on the warpath, my followers charged down the tracks. We swarmed into one end of the lunch wagon just as a tall, lanky youth emerged in full flight from the other end. Apparently show folk were a terrifying novelty to the owner of the wagon. He preferred to run the risk of seeing his property confiscated rather than face so many wild young Amazons. Having chased him out, I felt it my duty to look after his interests. Accordingly, I took my stand by the money box and collected for each item eaten. We cleaned out his larder, but we certainly left him with a swollen till.

Another time, we hit a town where an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" show was playing. We were capering up and down the tracks again when Renée Rogers of our company suddenly let out a squawk that was enough to make the straightest hair curl. She had happened to look behind her and had spied ambling along in the rear the "blood-hounds"

in the Uncle Tom show. Somebody was giving the dogs a little much-needed exercise. Poor Renée, who was afraid of a poodle, was simply terrified at the sight of those huge animals with their heads to the ground. With another despairing shriek, she started to run. Fear lent wings to her feet. But, alas, a running woman was the dogs' cue to go into action. They started full speed after Renée.

Everybody else began running too. Some of us were trying to stop the dogs, but most of us were trying to outrun them. You never saw such a scene. Girls fell down and brave men tripped over them and kept right on going. It would probably have been funny to a disinterested onlooker. Unfortunately there was nobody to appreciate the fine points of the comic business. Finally, poor Renée sank in a quivering heap and lay quite still with the dogs standing over her. When we caught up with her, she was crying bitterly and one sad-eyed hound was licking the tears away as fast as she shed them.

Although terribly shy at heart as a young thing — I still am — I was never at a loss for a ready answer. And like most folk whose quick wits make repartee a dangerous exercise, I was not always above sacrificing the feelings of others if by so doing I could draw a good laugh. And to teasing,

COMIC OPERA DAYS

I could usually respond with a retort that made the last laugh my own.

Wherever we went, during these early days of trouping, the attention of people in small towns was turned upon the members of our company. We were show folk and represented a world which had little in common with the staid, conventional lives of rural citizens. There were always groups of young men gathered outside the stage door when it came time for us to leave the theater. I always got a great thrill out of these mild demonstrations.

Nevada paid me six dollars a week when he had it. I lived on half of this amount and sent the other half home to Mother. All went well until mid-winter, when our little company found itself stranded in a small Michigan town. Bonita had already left the company to marry Richard Ganthony, a talented young man who was later to write that smash hit, "The Message from Mars."

I was one of the lucky ones who managed to make another connection right away. I landed a job in the chorus of the Grau Grand Opera Company, which was then touring the Middle West. I was told my salary would be eight dollars a week, and I'm sure I felt richer than Hetty Green.

As a matter of fact, Grau never paid me a cent. Everybody who drank was allowed twenty-five

cents a night for beer. I didn't drink, so I got nothing. I needed money desperately and I soon began to pester Grau for it.

Eventually, the wily Grau thought up a very clever little plan for getting rid of an annoying youngster. He arranged with his brother to dispatch him a telegram which read: "Send Dressler to Philadelphia. Want to get her clothes for opening here."

I had never been in a city in my life, and the thrill of setting out for one under such dazzling circumstances was almost more than I could bear. When nobody met me at the station, I was simple enough to be surprised. I had fifty cents over and above my railroad fare. I knew that wouldn't go far, even in the city of brotherly love. So I did what I always do when I get in trouble away from home: I went into a huddle with the nearest policeman. They have always been my good friends. There are a dozen in New York who call me "Muree" to this day.

The Philadelphia cop suggested that I go to the Continental, then the best hotel in town. I did.

"I want a room, but I have no money and no job," I told the night clerk.

And, incredible as it may sound, that blessed clerk gave me a room. Not only that, but when

I waked up next morning, I found an envelope under my door. It held two dollars and a scrawled note which said, "I got a kid of my own."

This wasn't the first or the last time that a hotel man proved a friend in time of need. More than any other group of citizens, or so it seems to me, they set the tone of a town. If the hotels of a city are run-down and characterless, you needn't look for a live church, or an up-and-coming theater. But wherever we found a decent hostelry, we knew we should do a brisk box-office business and that the general level of intelligence and appreciation would be high. I say, give a town a good hotel, and a good theater and a live church will follow.

But to get back to my story:

I rushed with my dressing the morning I found the hotel clerk's note under my door. I knew that two of my old comrades of the road, May Duryea and May Montford (now happily married to John Golden) were playing with the Deshon Opera Company, which at that time was enjoying a long run in Philadelphia. Pausing only to swallow a cup of coffee and to read the *Ledger,* I trotted uptown to catch the two Mays at rehearsal. They were indignant at the way I had been treated by Grau and offered to tackle their own manager for a job at once. Sure enough, their friendship landed me

a job at eight dollars a week. Just what Grau had promised but never paid me.

I longed to play good parts in the Deshon Company. I knew I had the voice for it, but I knew, too, that my face and voice didn't match. Just the same, I secretly yearned to sing *Brünnehilde.*

William Winter, the great critic, once said to me, "Marie you have a real grand opera voice. And you have the physique and stamina for opera. Did you ever think of having your voice trained?"

Did I ever think of it!

Only God can ever know how I longed for musical training. I dreamed of having piano lessons from my father, so that I could play my own accompaniments. But I was too proud or afraid to ask. Finally, Mother took her courage in her hands and begged him to teach me. At the end of the third lesson, in a towering rage, he struck my fingers from the keyboard.

"Idiot! Dolt!" he shouted, as he had shouted at those others.

That was the end of lessons for me. But nothing could kill my passionate love for music.

Although, in a way, I was happy with the Deshon Company, I knew that I had not yet found myself in the theater. While I was casting about for my particular niche, I saw "The Mikado" and knew

that, while Gilbert and Sullivan may have written the rest of the score, they had had nothing to do with the rôle of *Katisha.* It was conceived in heaven especially for me. I bought the score and in three days I could have sung *Katisha* backward or upside down.

I practiced anywhere and everywhere: in the shabby hotel bedroom which I shared with two other girls; on the streets, if they were sufficiently deserted; and when I could steal a chance, in an empty theater.

One day I arrived at the old theater on the corner of Broad and Columbia an hour ahead of the time set for rehearsal, so that I might have the exquisite pleasure of hearing myself spout *Katisha.* At that time, it seemed highly unlikely that anybody else would ever hear me spout it, as Agnes Hallock, who had been assigned the part, was an exceptionally robust young woman.

Well, anyway, there I was, singing away at the top of my voice and having the time of my life.

"I have a left shoulder blade that is a miracle of loveliness," I intoned ecstatically. "People come miles to see it!"

At this juncture, I was startled by a loud grunt from the wings. Turning, I beheld a bewildered stage hand who also had come early, to set the props

for the first scene. He looked as if he didn't know whether to stay and see it out or run.

I felt the need of somebody to play *Ko-Ko* to my *Katisha* and I thought he might do very well. You remember the part where *Katisha* seeks to impress *Ko-Ko* with the qualities she possesses in lieu of beauty? Well, I had just got to this point. Advancing upon the now transfixed stage hand, I roared, "Observe this ear!"

He looked thoughtfully at the indicated member, but failed to pick up his cue.

"Say, 'Large'," I prompted him.

By this time, the stage hand, whose head barely reached my shoulder, was thoroughly cowed.

"Large," he whispered hoarsely.

"Large?" I bellowed, returning to my lines. "Enormous! But think of its delicate mechanism! It is fraught with beauty! As for this tooth, it almost stands alone. Many have tried to draw it, but in vain!"

At that, discretion got the better of valor. I'm sure the poor man thought I was completely mad. He ran out of the theater so fast that you could have played marbles on his coat tails!

A few days later, my big chance came. A sprained ankle laid Agnes Hallock low. While the manager was running wildly about in circles,

wringing his hands and calling on high heaven to punish the poor girl, who had inconsiderately stepped into a mudhole on Broad Street, I came forth with the good news that I knew the part.

Finally, in desperation, the manager said, "The clothes fit her, anyway. Put her in."

And so, ingloriously, I went on. But my secret rehearsals had done their work. I lived the rôle of *Katisha.* And if I do say so, as shouldn't, I was a riot in the part.

At that time, I was still earning eight dollars a week, and proud of it. Eight years later, on the same Philadelphia stage, I earned eight hundred dollars. Fourteen years later, a manager begged for the privilege of paying me sixteen hundred dollars a week to play in Philadelphia.

Chapter

· IV ·

I HAD now been on the road almost a year. The first glamour of independence had worn off and I allowed myself the luxury of homesickness — something I hadn't dared face during those first few months. Now I admitted that I wanted desperately to see my mother. In fact, I had come to the place where I couldn't wait any longer to see her. Therefore, at the end of my run with the Deshon Company, I did not look for another engagement, but joyfully prepared to go home.

Those of you who have wandered far afield, and who recall that first sharply nostalgic pilgrimage back to your own home, will understand how I felt.

More thrilling than leaving home to become an actress, more thrilling than playing *Katisha* for the first time, was that first sweet adventure of

going back to my mother. The train crawled as we drew near Saginaw, Michigan, where my family was now living. I recognized no familiar landmarks for, you remember, my physical home was an uncertain quantity.

Most homing wanderers have a definite picture in mind as they approach home. With their mind's eye, they see the lilac bush by the doorstep, bending under its burden of snow . . . Father's chair in its special corner by the hearth . . . the afternoon sun slanting through a window to disclose a worn spot on the carpet.

It was not so with me. As always, home was simply where my mother was. There was no dear remembered background against which to visualize her fragile body, her busy hands. I knew I should find her in a kitchen. That was as far as my imagination could carry me. I couldn't get to her fast enough. And I knew that once in her presence, with the sound of her voice in my ears, I should never leave her again. Alas for the stability of human emotions. I had no sooner unpacked my trunk than I realized I should never be content to live at home again.

In a few days Father's tyranny became unbearable. I saw that I could no longer pretend to submit to it. I knew that I could not be dependent

upon another for my daily bread. Independence had become the breath of life to me. Even as a child, it was easier for me to give than to receive gracefully — which may have had something to do with the unhappy ending of my first love affair. I had not learned then that men prefer to do the giving. Very few males can stand the strain of being adored.

After my humiliating experience with Terry, I longed to fly to Mother's arms. It was my determination not to let her down that bolstered up my pride to the sticking point. Time and time again, when I was forced to wrestle with my besetting demon, stage fright, I should have given up in despair if I hadn't known that Mother was counting on the few dollars I sent her each week. And now that I had seen the great outside world, I realized afresh how shabby, how pathetically threadbare was my mother's existence. I dreamed of hanging pearls about her throat; of draping sables about her slender shoulders.

I would go back and find a better job. I would work as I had never worked before. I would make myself a great actress so that I could buy ease and beauty for my mother.

If I had been born into a normal, comfortable family life, the chances are I should have lived and

died Leila von Koerber, and Marie Dressler, for better or worse, would never have been born.

Success often has its roots in early privations. Of that I am certain. When I hear a parent say, "My child shall never suffer the hardships I've been through," it makes me sad. To protect a child too much is to give him the greatest possible hazard to overcome. Your girl, or your boy, has a right to his share of hard knocks. Don't deprive him of his birthright.

I can never forget what Gordon Selfridge, the American-born London merchant prince said, when somebody asked him what inspired his great career.

"The bay window on the banker's house in my home town," replied Selfridge. "Our house was little and mean. I made up my mind that some day I would have a house with two bay windows!"

I was like Selfridge. I wanted bay windows too — for my mother.

While I was having my first holiday at home, the George Baker Opera Company played Saginaw, and I promptly joined the troupe. To the Baker crowd I was always known as "Sag", because they had recruited me in Saginaw. Years later, when my name was blazing in electric lights on Times Square, Saginaw put in a lusty claim to me as a "native

daughter." This claim was disputed by Toronto, Canada; Bay City, Michigan; Findlay, Ohio, and other spots too numerous to catalogue here. I was so thrilled to find myself fought over that I tacitly allowed myself to be adopted by each community in turn. As I have already stated, I was actually born in Cobourg, Canada. However, I looked upon myself as an American citizen long before marriage actually made me one.

But this part of the story comes later.

If I remember correctly, Baker made a good haul in Saginaw. In those days, the managers of itinerant opera companies were always strict church-goers, for it was in the church choirs that they made some of their most valuable finds. So adept was George Baker at this game that he was known among his confrères as "the choir snatcher." More than one musical-comedy star who a generation ago thrilled Broadway with her pink tights and naughty songs owed her fame to the fact that she sat in a village choir on a Sunday morning when a wandering impresario was worshipping in their midst.

I wasn't in the choir the day that George picked me, but I was in the congregation. Mother had convoyed me to church under the fond impression that I was a celebrity. If I hadn't gone, I probably

should have missed a job that was to prove one of the most important of my life.

Those were the days when every actor had to serve a rigorous apprenticeship before he could hope for stardom. He had to play everything from a child to a doddering octogenarian. He was rehearsed mercilessly, and spent his spare time making new costumes out of old ones or helping throw together a new set of scenery. When his big chance came, he could be trusted to make the most of it.

Nowadays, a half-baked fledgling is often catapulted into the limelight before he or she is ready for it, frequently with disastrous results. I don't know anything sadder than a girl who has won a toothpaste contest, or a bathing-beauty crown, and is suddenly thrust into the front row of a famous revue, or hurried out to Hollywood. I've known youngsters to be rushed to the film capital and for a couple of years kept under contract and the delusion that they were to be made into motion-picture stars. Often they go home without ever having appeared even as an extra. Most of them are unfitted for other pursuits by their taste of Hollywood. Even when they are given a trial on the screen they haven't one chance in a thousand of getting employment. It takes training to make an actor.

That's why I think the old way is best.

My three-year engagement with the Baker Company gave me the severest and, by the same token, the best training of my entire career. We thought nothing of learning a new opera every week. And of course, while adding a new title to our repertoire, we were busy playing one old opera and rehearsing several others. At the end of my first twelve months, I had a repertoire of forty-odd operas. Only incessant and gruelling work made such an achievement possible, but I loved every minute of it. So did most of the others. George Baker was a hard taskmaster, but a fair one. Sometimes we had only one line to speak during a performance, but woe to us if we failed to deliver that line as if the whole production depended upon it.

I still play the Baker way from force of habit.

A lot of able actors resulted from the rigid discipline through which the old-time managers loved to put the members of their companies. Francis Wilson, De Wolf Hopper, Raymond Hitchcock, Fay Templeton, Charlie Bigelow, George Arliss, and May Robson are a few of the graduates that come to mind. Some of them are gone now, but a large percentage of those that got to the top stuck there as long as they remained in the theater.

I cannot understand why so many young stage people to-day scorn stock. To my mind, it offers the best possible schooling. In the first place, it teaches the beginner that the play is *the* thing. Nobody in a well-managed stock company feels too important to play a "bit." Look at the Moscow Art Players of a decade ago, at the Theater Guild, and the Irish Players of to-day, and you will see what I mean. The whole cast is animated by a singleness of aim that makes the individual actor lose sight of self. Thus, the various parts of a play fit together to make a perfect whole. This is art. This is theater!

Because our ermine robes were designed for a giantess and because I was the biggest woman in the company, I usually played royalty. As a general thing, I played the Queen, if there was one. But if the King had spent too much time propped against a local bar, I was given his beard and his lines. I was always the Queen, I remember, in "The Bohemian Girl." In "The Grande Duchesse" I played the title role. But I was frequently called on to take the part of the King in "Three Black Cloaks." For some reason I have never been able to fathom, the heavy was usually discovered drunk when the curtain went up on this old favorite.

At first, I felt pretty cocky about being chosen

to play royalty. It was not until I was assigned the rôle of *Barbara* in "The Black Hussars" that I realized that almost anybody can play swaggering romantic rôles; character work is the acid test. *Barbara* gave me my first chance to make an audience mine. My most popular rôles have always been those that portrayed the down-and-outer or the under dog. Poor *Tillie*, of "Tillie's Nightmare" was my greatest stage success, and it was *Marthy*, in "Anna Christie" which gave me my big chance on the screen.

The rôle of *Barbara* brought me a press notice which I still cherish. It appeared in a Minneapolis paper and read like this: "The young girl who played *Barbara* in 'The Black Hussars' tried to hide herself in the chorus, but she has a shape which might well win the golden apple."

Leaving the golden apple entirely out of the question, it was sweet to think that any man could see me hiding in a chorus, or behind a barn for that matter. To this day, I have a tender spot in my heart for Minneapolis!

During my three years with George Baker, I learned much that was to stand me in good stead the rest of my life. A naturally mobile face and a burning desire to do what anybody else could do kept me pushing steadily forward. I studied every-

thing, whether I ever expected to use it or not. I shall never forget the first person I ever saw do a back bend with a handkerchief. I practically wrecked the furniture in my room, but before I quit I could do a back bend with the next one!

Naturally, in the course of three years' trouping, we played many theaters again and again. I particularly enjoyed Cleveland. To this day, when I go back there and am called upon for a speech, I say in all sincerity, "I feel as if I know every one of you, because your fathers and your grandfathers used to wait for me at the stage door." Incidentally, I used this line in "Dinner at Eight."

In those days, I was always happy when our itinerary took us through the Middle West, but I dreaded New England like the plague. Our salaries were so small that we couldn't afford hotels. A decent boarding house was the best we could do, and in New England the doors of the good boarding houses were slammed in our faces. Nobody wanted troupers. We usually wound up by going to rooming houses and eating in drab restaurants.

After the long engagement with the Baker Opera Company terminated, I went to Chicago, where I joined Eddie Foy and Adele Farrington in "Little Robinson Crusoe", a Harry B. Smith musical piece.

I shall never forget this Chicago run because of an experiment in fasting which had an amusing dénouement. I was making enough to live on, but as Thanksgiving week approached, I became obsessed by a desire to send a large and impressive sum of money home to Mother. Accordingly, I mailed her all but a dollar of my funds, fondly believing that I could touch the manager for an advance to carry me through the week.

By eating lightly, I made my dollar stretch over two days. Not until my last nickel was gone could I get up courage to broach the subject of an advance to the manager. Unfortunately, other members of the cast had preceded me with hard-luck stories and he brusquely declined to do anything for me.

I managed to get through the next twenty-four hours fairly well, but on the second day of my fast, I was so ravenously hungry that I decided to go for a walk, in the hope that exercise would take my mind off my stomach. It had the reverse effect, for my feet dragged my unwilling body past every *rôtisserie* and bakery shop on Chicago's South Side. My sense of smell, always keen, had become painfully acute. Resolutely I refused to look in windows where food was displayed, but the delicious aromas that poured out on the sidewalk conjured

up maddening visions. Mirages of roast beef accompanied by golden yams and succulent gravy beckoned to me. Quite unconsciously, I turned into a small German restaurant and sat down at a table covered with a starched red-and-white cloth.

When the owner of the little restaurant came up to take my order, I took one look at his round kindly face and stammered out, "I forgot. I haven't any money. I must go." He put a hand on my shoulder and pushed me back into the chair from which I had half risen. In another moment, he had whisked to the stove and back and set before me a steaming bowl of tomato soup. And then, for the first time in my healthy young life, I fainted. But I revived in time to eat the last spoonful of soup before it got cold.

"I'll pay you in a few days," I told the little German gratefully.

I'm sure he never expected to see me again, but I did pay him, the very next day. And thereby hangs another tale.

That evening some girls I knew from another company pressed me to go with them to a beer garden. To my unsophisticated ears, a garden meant flowers and shrubbery, softly waving trees, and perhaps a tiny lake or two. But the garden

proved a disappointment. Stuffy and crowded, it was a sordid establishment filled with staring men and the odors of stale beer and fish. I felt uneasy and longed to escape, but I was afraid of offending my friends. Apparently they were unaware of the garden's shortcomings. They drank beer, flirted, and made merry generally.

At this time, I had not yet entirely overcome my fear of the Male Menace. Every nice girl of my generation was brought up on this bugaboo. My mother's parting advice had included a warning to beware of wicked men who lay in wait like hungry wolves to devour good little girls. I must confess that this pleasant nonsense had affected my conduct very little. But at the moment, I was weak from lack of food. Too, my experience with Terry was still fairly fresh in my mind. Now the leering glances of the men around me struck terror to my heart.

Directly across the table from me, a spectacled man with a wavy black mustache kept staring at me. My friends, lost in their own affairs, paid me no attention. Suddenly the man leaned across the table and whispered, "When I get up, don't say anything. But follow me. You'd better do as I say, or —" His threatening manner had a hypnotic effect upon me. Scarcely conscious of what I was doing, I

obeyed him. He rose and I followed him out of the beer garden.

Commandeering a passing carriage, he helped me into it. By now I had become so terrified I couldn't have asked a question to save my life. We rode in silence, which my abductor broke only to inquire my address. Filled with overwhelming relief, I realized that he was taking me home. When we reached my rooming house, he set me abruptly on the doorstep. Reaching into his pocket, he drew out two five-dollar gold pieces and put them in my hand. His face and voice were stern. "Don't go in places like that again," he admonished. "They are not for decent girls like you."

With that he disappeared into the night, leaving me richer but more perplexed than ever about the dual nature of the male of the species.

The ten dollars was a fortune to me. I sought out the kind German restaurant owner and paid him for the soup. I then sat down at one of his tables and ordered a meal which lingers in my memory to this day. There was a steak larger than any I have seen before or since. The jolly round face of the German beamed as he set before me everything the menu had to offer.

As I trudged back to my rooming house, warmed by good food and a sense of high adventure, it

occurred to me that perhaps Mother had exaggerated the Male Menace. Even Terry's treachery no longer seemed quite monumental. Here in the short space of twenty-four hours, two strange men had gone out of their way to befriend me. Well, maybe the German hadn't exactly gone out of his way, but he had certainly seen his duty when it was put before him. At any rate, the bugaboo was gone forever. My terror of men had vanished. From then on, I looked upon them almost indulgently and even a little protectingly.

After "Little Robinson Crusoe" I played in "The Tar and the Tartar." Mine was the rôle of the Tartar. I loved it. Frankie Bailey was also a member of this company. Probably most of you readers are too young to know that Frankie was famed as the possessor of the most beautiful legs in the world. At seventy-two, her legs are still shapely. Hale and hearty, she lives in Hollywood, where she is not above displaying a well-turned ankle with the rest of the girls. I remember though, what a struggle we had to get Frankie into her first pair of tights. She thought them frightfully immodest!

When the "Tartar" folded its wings on the road, I straggled into New York and landed a part as a brigand in "The Robber of the Rhine." This was a romantic comedy written by no less a person

than Maurice Barrymore, famous father of that famous trio, Lionel, Ethel and John. The "Robber" was put on at the old Fifth Avenue Theater.

No sooner had I presented myself for rehearsals than I realized I was the right person in the wrong pew. Nobody wanted me in the cast, and everybody did everything they could to get rid of me. I pretended that I was a rhinoceros and laughed gaily at barbed darts.

After long, miserable weeks of rehearsal and discord, we faced the ordeal of an opening night together. Everybody was nervous and uncertain. In the opening scene, actor after actor "went up" in his lines. Fortunately, I knew my lines and those of the rest of the cast, too. Taking my stand in the wings when I was off-stage, I prompted the faltering ones. Somehow or other, we stumbled through the evening. But I was depressed by the way things had gone. While I removed my make-up, I debated which of two courses to pursue: Should I walk out now, or should I wait to be fired? Suddenly it seemed that, after all, I was to have no choice in the matter. There was loud pounding and louder shouting outside my dressing room door. I recognized the hand and the voice of Richard Barker, the director. Expecting to get a good hauling over the coals for my offi-

cious prompting, along with my dismissal from the company, I drew a long breath, poked my nose through a cautious crack in the door and stammered, "Here I am, Mr. Barker."

To my amazement, he thrust the door wide open and grabbed me by the shoulders. "Marie," he shouted, still talking at the top of his lungs, "you are a brick! I can never thank you for the way you used your head tonight. If it hadn't been for you, the audience would have booed us off the stage!"

Barker's generous praise saved my pride, but nothing could have saved the show. It died quietly of malnutrition a few weeks later.

It was Maurice Barrymore who first fathomed my secret ambition to play tragedy and warned me against it.

"You were born to make people laugh, Marie," he told me gently. "Don't try to fly in the face of fate!"

I did try, years later, and recalled Maurice's words. But that part of the story comes later.

Poor Maurice! His beloved "Robber of the Rhine" was gone and so was my job. Again the terrible necessity of earning money dogged my footsteps and my dreams. At this time, I was supporting not only my parents and two elderly

aunts, but also Bonita and her young husband, who had had a run of hard luck.

Thankfully I took a job at the old Atlantic Garden on the Bowery. Here I sang two songs nightly for ten dollars. On Sunday nights, I sang at Koster and Bial's on Twenty-Third Street, where I got fifteen dollars. Because it was cheaper, I boarded in Brooklyn. When my money gave out, I walked the entire distance there and back. Memories of those days are responsible for the dry grin I can't keep back nowadays when I hear some youngster complaining bitterly because he has to put up with a Lincoln instead of a Rolls or a Suiza.

In the old days most of the theatrical agencies could be found in the neighborhood of Fourteenth Street. To-day, of course, they are on and off Times Square. I don't know what the modern ones are like, but I can tell you that those I haunted years ago were the dreariest spots imaginable. Usually you walked up two or three flights of musty stairs to a dim, airless anteroom, as changeless as time itself. The curls of dust in the corners, the hard shabby chairs against the dingy wall, the very faces of the occupants of the chairs made a sort of horrid, recurrent dream from which there was no waking. For days on end, week

in and week out, the fantastic pattern of those faces rarely changed. Occasionally there was a new one, but you seldom missed an old one.

There was the old Shakespearian actor who buttonholed you to whisper of the dead glories of his *Hamlet* or *Lear*. There was the dapper young man with the nervous hands, whose courage ebbed visibly each afternoon but was mysteriously renewed each morning. On the sagging sofa under the picture of Ada Rehan a group of ingenues huddled together, chattering excitedly of the part they almost got; but the moment the door to the inner office was even cracked, they moved defensively apart, each determined to fight for herself. Oh, it was all dreadful beyond any power of mine to describe, — the sitting there; the endless waiting for the rabbit-faced office boy or the haughty ex-chorus girl secretary to pop through the door with the same old refrain:

"Nothing to-day."

Then the scraping of chair legs; the dragging of heavy feet on the stairs. And to-morrow the same faces, the same old, old story. I know one girl who made the rounds of the agencies for three years without getting even a nibble. And she had been a conspicuous success in a show that ran a whole season. Through a trick of fate, she had been cast

in the one rôle she could play. But she couldn't give up hope even after hope must have been dead.

If I had a stage-struck child whom I wanted to discourage, I should force him to make the rounds of the theatrical agencies for three or four weeks. If his ambition and his courage survived the dreariness of it, then I should let him go ahead.

I had had my name in electric lights on Broadway, but I wore my soles thin before I landed a part as the Queen in the revival of "1492." Things were going fine when Ed Rice approached me with that famous wheedling smile of his. "Marie," he said, "I got a great show for you — the hit of your life."

Although I refused repeatedly — being unwilling at that time to sacrifice a sure thing for a possibility — he at last prevailed upon me to join his show. He accomplished this by the simple expedient of persuading a man to put up the money for its production by telling him that Dressler had promised to play the lead.

The play was a flop, as I had feared it would be. I was lucky to find an opening in "Madelaine of the Magic Kiss" in which Camille D'Arville was then starring. Following this, I had a piece of grand good fortune: I was chosen to support Lillian Russell in "The Princess Nicotine" at the

Casino, under Canary and Lederer. As usual with Lederer's productions, no expense was spared in assembling a brilliant cast.

LILLIAN RUSSELL

Opera Comique Organization

CANARY & LEDERER . Proprietors & Directors

IN

THE PRINCESS NICOTINE

Opera Comique in Three Acts

BY CHARLES ALFRED BYRNE AND LOUIS HARRISON
Music by William Furst

DISTRIBUTION OF CHARACTERS

CHICOS, *a tobacco planter*	Signor Perugini
DON PEDRO, *Governor of Ciudad Real*	Mr. Digby Bell
CABANA, *first Alguacil*	Mr. Alf C. Wheelan
NOVO MUNDO, *second Alguacil*	Mr. Chas. A. Bigelow
BISHOP	Mr. James G. Peakes
ALCALDE, *Police Magistrate*	Mr. Arthur Etherington
WATCHMAN	Mr. L. H. Ducker
CATALINA, *a plantation waif*	Miss Lucy Daly
THE DUCHESS, *wife of Don Pedro*	Miss Marie Dressler
GOMEZ, *Page to the Duchess*	Miss Marie Miller
CHICA	Miss May Duryea
MANUELA	Miss Lila Blow
CHIQUITA	Miss Georgie Dennin
PEPITA	Miss Marie Celeste
DRUMMER BOY	Miss Kesia Carlstadt
MAID	Miss Grace Belasco
FIFER	Miss Edith Merrill
and	
ROSA, *the Princess Nicotine*	LILLIAN RUSSELL

Not only did this show provide me with an excellent rôle, but it also marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship with one of the most generous and gifted women who ever brightened the American scene.

Chapter

· V ·

LA RUSSELL was the great beauty of her day and the toast of the town. I can still recall the rush of pure awe that marked her entrance on the stage. And then the thunderous applause that swept from orchestra to gallery, to the very roof.

Lillian was as lovable as she was lovely. She lighted up a room with her friendliness. From the first, Russell and I hit it off well together. They used to call us "Beauty and the Beastie", but we didn't care.

Even in those far-off days when curves were curves and no apologies to anybody, Lillian was afraid of getting fat. Bicycles were modish and she hit upon this new toy of the fashionables as a means of keeping us both in trim. Every morning, rain or shine, we would climb on our wheels and bending low over our handlebars give an imi-

tation of two plump girls going somewhere in a hurry. Our route was nearly always the same. Lillian lived in Seventy-sixth Street, so we dashed first into Central Park for a turn about the reservoir. Then if we weren't panting too painfully we would wheel over to Judge Smith's impressive house for a pre-luncheon call on the Judge.

Because we sometimes wore tights on the stage and often dropped in unchaperoned upon the Judge, who was a bachelor and a famous character about town in the nineties, I'm afraid the neighbors looked upon us as "bad, bold females." His father had been a gallant officer in the Confederate Army, we were told by friends from the South. Nobody seemed to know just when the Judge, witty, amiable, and ease-loving, had drifted to New York. By the time Lillian and I met him, he was an established and familiar figure in the smart crowd that follows the horses from race track to race track, season in and season out. His title had nothing to do with a knowledge of Blackstone and torts; it derived solely from his uncanny gift for guessing what a given piece of horse flesh would do in a pinch, and to the fact that he was frequently called upon to say whose nose came in first.

When I think of the innocent deviltries of the Judge, which consisted chiefly of paying us ex-

travagant compliments and plying us with scented cigarettes, I have to smile at his reputation among fond mamas with debutante daughters under their wings. He was a dear, sweet soul who happened to be born with a predatory gleam in his eye!

"It must be wonderful to be famous. Everybody knows you," I said to Lillian once. "La, no, child," she replied. "You ought to try to eat raw oysters in a restaurant with every eye focused on you. It makes you feel as if the creatures were whales, your fork a derrick, and your mouth the Mammoth Cave."

Whether she liked it or not, Lillian Russell was for a quarter of a century one of the most conspicuous figures on the English-speaking stage. Darling of the critics, idol of orchestra and gallery alike, she held public favor for an unprecedented period. She was a golden beauty who stampeded men's senses. Even if she had possessed no voice — and her voice was magnificent — she would have been a great success. The cold-blooded press went into ecstasies over her flawless features, her acting, her incomparable charm.

It always struck me as incongruous that this exotic golden creature should have sprung from the loins of our own strong, prosaic Middle West. Vienna or Moscow would have been a more likely

WEBER AND FIELDS WITH MISS DRESSLER IN "HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY"

LILLIAN RUSSELL

DAN DALY

birthplace, but she was born in Clinton, Iowa, where her father, Charlie Leonard, was a well-known newspaper man. Her mother once ran for the office of mayor of New York on a woman's-rights ticket. It would have been difficult to find anybody less concerned about women's rights than Cynthia Leonard's daughter. Lillian opened her cornflower blue eyes on a world eager to heap the precious and inalienable rights of womanhood upon her blonde head. She started life completely equipped to get whatever she wanted without recourse to the ballot.

Lillian couldn't have been more than three when her family moved to Chicago. It was here that she was educated by the sisters of the School of the Sacred Heart. And it was the sisters who first predicted that she would be a great actress and singer. They took pride in showing her off in their school exhibitions and persuaded her parents that she should be sent abroad to study for grand opera.

When Lillian was barely seventeen, her mother started to Europe with her, but in New York fate took a hand. She met Ed Rice and he immediately offered her a part in his current extravaganza. Always practical, she whom her doting father called "airy, fairy Lillian" persuaded her mother that a

chorus job in hand is worth any number of nebulous grand-opera careers around the corner.

In less than two months after she joined Rice's company, Lillian made the first of her numerous essays into matrimony. She married Harry Braham, leader of Ed Rice's orchestra. She seems to have had a weakness for orchestra leaders, for eight years later she divorced Braham to marry "Teddy" Solomon, another wielder of the baton. Mean while, she had left Ed Rice's management for that of Tony Pastor. It was Tony who launched her as Lillian Russell and speedily made her the stage favorite of her generation.

What she didn't owe to Tony, she owed to her second husband. Solomon took her to Europe, paid for lessons under the best masters, and in every way encouraged her to develop her wonderful voice. But Lillian never loved Solomon. Years later, she complained bitterly of his stinginess. Her chief grievance seemed to be that he forced her to wear made-over clothes while he boasted a wardrobe of sixteen suits. She never forgave him for this affront to her pride. Although he was the father of the daughter whom she adored, she had her marriage to him annulled.

The press loved to refer to La Russell as "every inch a prima donna." Tony Pastor, who picked

more winners than any other man in the theatrical game, with the possible exception of Florenz Ziegfeld, exclaimed the first time he clapped eyes on her: "Destiny and the cornfields of Iowa shaped her for the stage!"

But I, who played with her for months on end, who knew her and loved her like a sister, tell you that she was not cut out for the stage. Temperamentally, she was cut out for a bungalow apron, a kitchen smelling of ginger cookies, roses clambering over the back fence, and a yard just big enough to hold a clucking hen and a brood of biddies. Instinctively the most domestic of women, she would have been perfectly happy if fate had let her grow up in some little Iowa town, where she could do her own cooking, and run to the door when the evening whistles blew to look for her man coming up the street.

It was her longing for domesticity, for an anchor to windward, that betrayed her into her third and most unfortunate marriage. Like most beautiful women, Lillian was none too clever about men. And when the fiery, romantic Signor Perugini (born plain John Chatterton in the backwoods of Michigan) joined our company and laid siege to her heart with an eye, I am sure, to advancing himself to co-stardom, she could not resist her dream

of finding her master. In the strutting Perugini she fancied she beheld a king among men.

We were playing "Giroflé-Girofla" at the time, and I had an excellent opportunity to observe Russell and Perugini together daily. Perugini was one of the finest tenors of his day, but he was petty, effeminate, and colossally selfish and conceited. To tell the truth, I despised him. He didn't waste any love on me, either, for he soon guessed that I was on to his capers.

I used to get on my make-up in half the time it took the others, and I often dropped into the star's dressing room to kill time while she was finishing. I had to pass Perugini's dressing room on my way to Lillian's, and I took a malicious pleasure in reporting anything I could find to laugh at. I'm afraid I never missed a chance to poke fun at the tenor's mannerisms. Once I caught him tweaking his eyebrows and smirking at himself in the mirror. I could not resist mimicking this absurd performance for Lillian's benefit. Always before she had giggled when I made fun of him, but this night she clung to my arm and looked at me pleadingly.

"Don't, Marie," she begged. "He's just asked me to marry him and I think I'm going to do it!"

For once in my life, I could think of nothing to say. Indeed, there was nothing to say. If Lillian had

made up her mind to take Perugini, she would take him and that was the end of it. I was too fond of Russell to run the risk of hurting her further by exhibitions of my distaste for the man who was now her fiancé. I even tried to find something in Perugini to like. Failing this, I put myself out to shield Lillian from prying eyes and over-eager ears and tongues. On the evening of the wedding, I tricked the reporters into following a false trail, thus giving the lovers a chance to slip over to Newark and get married quietly.

They were married less than a week when there were whispers of an estrangement. Anybody could see something was wrong. As soon as the last curtain fell, Lillian would rush feverishly around, inviting people to go home with her after the show. It was evident that she did not want to be alone with Perugini. I think she was afraid of him even then.

Perugini had counted on being co-starred with his bride. When Lederer refused to take his hints on the subject, the tenor grew furious and, like the coward he was, he took out his anger and disappointment on Lillian, who didn't know how to fight back. I probably made matters worse by taking up the cudgels in her defense.

A beast in private, a martyr in public — that

was our handsome friend, Perugini. He treated Russell with unbelievable brutality. Some of the things he said to her on the stage just too softly for the audience to hear wouldn't bear printing. Presently news of the couple's marital difficulties got abroad. Of course there were many sentimental women eager to sympathize with "Poor Signor Perugini." They would hang around the theater and wait for him to come out after the matinée. He thrived on this sort of thing and played up to it for all he was worth.

I kept getting madder and madder. Once during a performance, Perugini called his wife a name that made me furious. "If you ever say that again, I'll throw you into the bass drum," I told him under cover of my lines. He knew I would do it too, and he cooled down considerably during the rest of the act. When the curtain fell, I picked up a stage brace and he made for his dressing room. He refused to go on again that night until the manager provided him with a bodyguard. It was funny to watch him scuttle from dressing room to stage and back, protected from his stage mother-in-law by a couple of able-bodied scene shifters.

The following Saturday after the matinée, I left early to find the usual delegation of hysterical females waiting for a glimpse of "Poor Signor

Perugini." Their chatter made me so sick that I climbed up on a convenient barrel and then and there made my first public speech. In plain, unvarnished English, I told those silly women the truth about their handsome idol. A few booed me at first, but before I finished, the crowd was silent and respectful. After that, there were no more hisses for Lillian.

This change in the attitude of the public seemed to make Perugini more beastly than ever in private. The crisis came in Philadelphia. During an altercation of more than usual violence, he attempted to throw his wife out of a seventh-story hotel window. He would have succeeded too, if it hadn't been for the timely intervention of a chambermaid. This scene brought Lillian to her senses. She refused to remain longer under the same roof with him.

Four years later, Perugini sued for divorce, stating that Russell had deserted him two years after their marriage. This was an attempt to save his face. As a matter of fact, the separation took place two months after the wedding.

Although it did not hurt her in the box office, the publicity attendant upon her various marital adventures did Lillian no good with the guardians of the public morals. During the Mauve Decade,

even ladies of the stage were not supposed to acquire and discard husbands with the nonchalance that marked the great Russell's way with men. One Texas preacher of the hell-fire-and-brimstone denomination thundered from his pulpit that Sarah Bernhardt and Lillian Russell were "the most eminent of fallen women." I suppose the good man was surprised to find that his denunciation had landed him on every front page in the country. I never heard what Bernhardt's reaction to the arraignment was. Lillian's comment was, "La, la!"

To criticisms of her private life, or of her voice, she never paid the slightest attention. Serene in the confidence that both were above reproach, she went calmly about her business, even when barbed arrows were thickest. The only adverse criticism I ever knew to get under her skin was an ill-natured comment in the *London Stage* on a florid eulogy which had just appeared in the *Spirit of the Times*, a New York paper. I have the clipping in my scrapbook, and I quote it here, principally because of the picture it conveys of the dear, dead days when Russell was the high priestess of musical comedy, and I was still her humble and admiring acolyte:

The revival of "The Grande Duchesse" at the Casino, New York, has been the occasion for the critic of the

Spirit of the Times to enthuse over the prima donna, Miss Lillian Russell. "She looks like a dream of pure loveliness and sings like an angel," says the scribe, and then, having gone so far, attempts to cap his remarks thus: "Last of all, to send the audience home with a living picture of delight, Queen Lillian appears in a frou-frou dress of pink satin and white lace, with a blue cape, a Directoire hat, twenty-two-button boots of pink kid, a silver-mounted staff, and jewels of turquoises and diamonds. If Wagner had been fortunate enough to see her in this costume, he would have composed for her a cyclus of Offenbachian operas."

The last sentence is a wee bit obscure, but let it pass. The critic who has eyes for an elaborate costume, let alone the twenty-two button pink kid boots, and can describe it so accurately may be excused. But why "a wee bit obscure," you say? If Wagner had written a cyclus of Wagnerian operas for Lillian Russell she could not have been in them, being a comic-opera prima donna. Consequently, he would have written Offenbachian operas — say the *Meistersinger* mollified into the *Mistressinger!*

A nasty dig, that last line. No wonder Lillian tore the clipping into shreds.

In 1912, Lillian made her fourth marriage and her first happy one when she became the wife of Alexander P. Moore of Pittsburg. Moore was a prominent publisher and he grew into a distin-

guished statesman. During the first two years of the Coolidge Administration he served as Ambassador to Spain.

As Mrs. Moore, Lillian's position in society was impregnable. She gave up the stage, except for occasional appearances for charity. In 1921, President Harding sent her to Europe to study immigration problems. She concluded her mission successfully, but she slipped on the deck of the vessel that was bringing her back to America and severely injured herself. A year later, she died from complications resulting from this fall.

Kind, generous, "airy, fairy Lillian!" Everybody loved her, but few knew her. Only two people in her life understood her; both were men. The first was her father, Charlie Leonard, who would sit up all night in a day coach, if necessary, and travel a thousand miles to hear her sing three songs. The second was Alexander Moore, who gave her the only true happiness she ever knew.

But I have strayed far out of the Mauve Decade that was to mark the beginning of my own stardom.

It was in 1896 that rumors of the wonderful English comedy, "Lady Slavey", began to circulate in New York. Presently Lederer sent for me and offered me the part of *Flo Honeydew* of the Music

Halls, the stellar rôle which already had been rehearsed by no less than five women, including the much-heralded Bettina Gerard. I had heard that Dan Daly, the greatest eccentric dancer of his day, was to be in the cast, so I said I would accept the rôle if Daly would dance with me.

I knew this was asking a great deal, for Daly had a reputation for being extremely high-handed and difficult. Tall as a tree and thin as a rail, he was, I think, the most graceful man I have ever seen. A more brilliant comedian or a more finished one never brightened our stage. He was all Irish and all fire. His darting wit was as quick as an adder's thrust, and it could be as deadly. I was prepared to dislike him, for the tales I had heard led me to suspect him of being conceited and self-seeking. He was neither, as I was later to learn, but he required perfection in others as he required it in himself. And like most really great artists, he did not underrate his own worth. In short, Dan Daly took plenty of knowing, but when you knew him, you were eager to concede both his genius and his generosity.

Unfortunately, when Lederer approached me on the subject of playing in "Lady Slavey", I knew Daly only by reputation and I was in no humor to concede anything. My ultimatum about dancing

with him apparently did not appeal to the great Daly, and he made no bones about saying so.

"Dance with that elephant of a Dressler?" he snorted. "Not if I know it!"

Lederer persuaded him to humor me. "We'll probably drop the number before the opening," he promised.

Finally, Daly consented to be seen with me at rehearsals, which he made as difficult as possible. "Ah, Dressler," he would taunt, "don't you think we ought to rehearse at least a dozen encores for this?"

The cast of "Lady Slavey" is one I like to remember. Many of the players are forgotten now, but forty years ago theirs were names to conjure with on Broadway:

Messers. Klaw & Erlanger

Present

Canary & Lederer's

Newest Musical Offering, Entitled

THE LADY SLAVEY

An Operatic Comedy in Two Acts

Entirely New Music by Mr. Gustave Kerker

English Book by Mr. George Dance

Americanized and Staged under the Personal Direction of Mr. George W. Lederer

DISTRIBUTION OF CHARACTERS

William Endymion Sykes, *assistant to Roberts*	Dan Daly
Roberts, *Sheriff's Officer*	Charles Danby
Major Tolliver, *an Impecunious English Gentleman*	Joseph S. Greensfelder
Lord Lavender, *an Awful Swell*	Richard Carle
Ikey Dinkelbinkel, *another Swell of a Different Type*	Charles Kirke
Vincent Evelyn, *an American Millionaire*	C. L. Tallman
Artemus Snipe, *a Grocer*	Nicholas Burnham
Krackowitzsky, *a Tailor*	G. Hazleton Haynes
Flo Honeydew, *of the Music Halls*	Marie Dressler
Phyllis, *the Lady Slavey*	May Duryea
Beatrice, Marjorie, Grace, Maud — *Major Tolliver's Daughters*	Marie George, Jessie Carlisle, Leda Lear, Clara Franton
Harriet Snipe, *the Grocer's daughter*	Dorothy Neville
Mme. Pontet	Edith Millward
Bessette, Susette, Dollette — *Milliners*	Nellie Berwick, Florence Dressler, Laurel Atkins
Rosette, Evette, Pepette, Vivette — *Modistes*	Marie MacKenzie, Annie Clay, Lillian Ward, Lulu Mooney

Tailors, Grocers, Cooks, Haberdashers, Footmen, Undertakers, Clairvoyants, Shoemakers, etc., by the Ladies and Gentlemen of the Chorus. La Petite Adelaide, in Graceful Pas Seul in Act II.

The play opened in Washington in September 1896 before an audience of celebrities such as one seldom finds gathered in one spot. Chauncey Depew, then at the height of his fame, was there with a party of distinguished statesmen and their

ladies. Joseph Choate occupied a box with friends. Buffalo Bill Cody, in all the glory of his Wild West trappings, sat in the third row. To cap the climax, we had been told that President Cleveland and a party of guests would honor us with their presence. This news served to heighten the nervousness incident to any opening night. The entire cast was in a twitter of excitement. Even Daly, the great, chewed alternately at his nails and his handsome moustache.

As it turned out, our apprehensions were well-founded. That brilliant first-night crowd was, I believe, the coldest I encountered in fifty years of trouping. Playing outdoors in the Arctic circle to an audience of seals and polar bears would have been a heart-warming experience compared to the one we endured on that mild September evening in the city of Washington in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and ninety-six! Gay witty lines tossed out to that audience were sodden with dullness before they got across the footlights. All that you could say for the customers was that they didn't hiss. Seasoned veterans came off-stage shaking with the jitters.

When my cue came my old demon, stage-fright had me by the throat. I rushed on and in my nervous terror hit my hat, which twirled ridicu-

lously. That accident and a hastily improvised eccentric dance with Dan Daly saved the day. Our audience thawed, laughed and was with us to a man!

At last I was a big-time success!

Chapter

· VI ·

IT is nearly midnight on Broadway.

Horses' hoofs ring against the pavement, for this was thirty-eight years ago, when carriages, instead of limousines, lined up in front of theater doors, and pedestrians dodged hansom cabs instead of taxis.

Two girls, elbows on the sill, lean out of a rooming-house window that looks down upon the milling crowd in Times Square. A little girl and a big one with green eyes and red hair. Both munch thick hamburger sandwiches and delightedly drop crumbs down the necks of the passers-by below. They are still out of breath, these two. Gasping and giggling, they have rushed home from the theater and scrambled madly up three flights of stairs to gape blissfully at an electric sign that blinks atop the Casino across the way:

Marie Dressler in Lady Slavey!

I pinch myself black and blue, but I cannot make myself believe it is *my* name there in letters of fire. I pinch May Duryea, my roommate, who leans beside me on the window sill. May screams and almost pitches out on her head. We clutch each other and go off into gales of laughter. We are real; maybe the miracle is real. But it's hard to credit. Marie Dressler, a great gawk of a nobody from the sticks, a star on the Street of Stars!

The wonder of it never palls. Night after night we dash home to play our childish game. Until we go on tour, it remains our favorite diversion.

"Lady Slavey" was my first big success. I wasn't quite twenty-five when we moved from Washington, where we opened, to the Casino in New York. We played the Casino two years and took the show on the road for two more. It had taken me exactly eleven years to make Broadway. Eleven years of tank towns and hard work and little pay, — sometimes no pay at all. But it was worth it all to hang out of a window now and watch my name in electric lights on one of the finest theaters in the country. Even to-day, out here in Hollywood, surrounded by stars who weren't born then, I can still feel the thrill of those first weeks at the Casino.

Glamorous Broadway!

Monstrous candle in whose white-hot glow thousands of human moths beat their bright wings year after year.

Dingy Broadway!

Crooked streets debouching into crooked alleys that lead to battered stage doors and hopes gone wrong.

Glorious Broadway!

Splendid thoroughfare of dreams come true! Marie Dressler's Broadway. Marie Dressler's world. Her oyster!

It was all very exciting and very sweet.

There is only one thing sweeter than success when you are young. And that is the loyalty of faith of even one friend when you are old, down-at-heel, and to all, except the eyes of love, out of the ring for good. But at this stage of my career, age seemed remote, improbable, fantastic. I simply could not imagine that my flaming mop would ever grow dull or my splendid energy diminish. Happy, full of irrepressible spirits, bursting with fun, I played as hard off the stage as on. My fun was that of a boisterous, undisciplined puppy.

Once, when I was a paid entertainer in the home of Mrs. Orme Wilson, one of New York's first hostesses, I became enamored of the shining banister that wound from the third floor, where I had been

sent to leave my wrap, to the great hall below. The banister was designed by Stanford White and its curves were pure poetry.

"If I don't slide down that," I told myself, "I'll die."

There was nobody in sight. I took a deep breath and landed in a heap at the foot of the stairs. Imagine my horror when I saw bearing down upon me the butler, whose frosty hauteur had frozen my soul when I arrived. He picked me up and dusted me off without a flicker of expression on his correct countenance, meanwhile murmuring cordially:

"Very good, Miss. Very good indeed. I've always wanted to take a go at it myself!"

Although I was now a head-liner, I still had to count the pennies, for I had my family to support. I laugh when I think of the gay picture most people cherish of the musical-comedy star of thirty-five years ago. My wildest parties in those days were occasional suppers at Rectors. And if an admirer snatched off Anna Held's or Lillian Russell's slipper and drank champagne out of it, we all felt that the heights of daring and deviltry had been reached.

After we opened on Broadway, I lived with May Duryea, a good trouper if there ever was one,

only a few months. As soon as "Lady Slavey" made it possible for me to do so, I found a cheap frame house with a homey look on the outskirts of Long Island City and set up housekeeping. Then, aglow with happiness, I wired Mother one word: "Come!"

Of course Father knew he was included in the invitation. I've already told you we rubbed each other the wrong way, my father and I. But we both adored Mother and we were glad to put up with each other for her sake.

My friends in the theater thought I was a fool to commute three hours a day. The prospect dismayed me not at all. I was so full of vitality that nothing seemed difficult. I have long since come to the conclusion that the lucky women in this world are not the beauties; nor the rich ones; no, nor the gifted ones. They are those who are born well and strong and who have the good sense, or the good fortune, to stay that way.

Look around you and see if I am not right.

Most of the unhappy, frustrated wives I know are the ones who get tired too easily. Some of them can't help it, of course. But far too many have lost their vitality and sparkle because they've made skeletons of themselves for fashion's sake. And a lot more are tired because they've found nothing bet-

ter to do than to live for themselves, think about themselves, love themselves. No wonder they get bored.

If a man takes a woman to support, and presumably to cherish, he deserves a fair return. If his wife doesn't see to it that he gets it, some other woman will. And more power to her, say I! Doubtless there are men who have remained faithful to listless, take-it-for-granted wives, but I never heard of one who enjoyed the job, did you?

And now I am going to tell you something which may seem funny to you, but which was deadly serious to me. In everybody's mind there is a symbol which stands for wealth and position — something the possession of which will mark a milestone. People say, "When my ship comes in, I'm going to have a yacht . . . or a chicken farm . . . or a baby." With me, it was a horse and carriage. The reason for this strange ambition went far back into my childhood.

In the series of little Canadian towns in which I scrambled up, the rich rode; the poor walked. We walked. I used to clench my fists when I thought of my wealthy step-grandmother Henderson, sailing along behind her high-stepping bays, matched to a hair, while my delicately nurtured mother bent over a hot stove, cooking for boarders. I couldn't

have been more than six when I first promised myself, "Some day I'll buy a horse and carriage for Mother." And now the great moment had come. I had Mother and I had a good job.

Acquiring the carriage was simple. But did you ever try to buy a horse? I peered into the mouths of hundreds of candidates. I would stop perfectly strange horses on the street to make friendly overtures. But, alas, those in whose dental equipment I felt confidence always cost too much.

I remember once I spied a handsome beast in the full regalia of a police mount standing outside a Broadway restaurant. I knew well enough that this dashing creature with its arched neck and coat groomed to satin smoothness was not for the likes of me. Still a cat may look at a queen, and surely an actress may look her fill at a policeman's horse. But, alas, I could not confine myself to looking. Before I knew it, I was making my customary survey; running a hand down the animal's forelegs to discover a possible enlarged joint, exploring the hind legs for spavin. I was just going into the dental situation in a large way when a burly Irish bluecoat clapped a hand on my shoulder.

"Were ye thinkin' o' havin' me arrested for cruelty to animals?" he demanded with heavy humor.

"Oh, no," I stammered. "I was just looking him over. I'm sort of hipped on horses."

He gave me a quick look. " 'Tis easy to see ye're hipped on somethin', me lass," he growled, and throwing himself into the saddle, he rode away, leaving me to enjoy the guffaws of the small crowd that had gathered.

You would think that this would have cured me of making passes at strange horses, but no, the thing was in my blood by this time. I went right on inviting insult from truck drivers, cabbies, and amused pedestrians.

Finally, somebody told me about a fine animal for sale in a little New Jersey town. I got up at dawn one Sunday morning and made the trip over. The horse had a kind face. We took to each other at once. The low price should have warned me that something was wrong, but I am by nature a trusting soul. Proudly I conducted my purchase across the river and home to Mother.

We called the new member of the family Teddy, after the indomitable Roosevelt whom we all admired extravagantly. The morning following Teddy's arrival, behold Mother and me hitching him to the carriage with its elegant fringed top, and gaily setting off along the country road for our first drive.

For a hundred yards or so, all went well. Then Teddy stopped dead in his tracks. No amount of persuasion or pleading could move him. When we had given up all hope, he started forward of his own sweet will. Another hundred yards, and again he planted his forelegs firmly in the dust. Eventually we discovered that Teddy's former owner had neglected to tell us that our carriage horse had spent his life between the shafts of a milk wagon.

Mother wisely decided to humor Teddy. When she took her friends driving and they commented on his little idiosyncrasy, she would explain sweetly, "Oh, Teddy is a very superior animal. He knows just where the best scenery is and he always stops without being told!"

Those years with Mother are among the sweetest in my memory. Sundays in summer were heavenly after the heat of the city. I can still remember the sigh of satisfaction I used to heave when I unhooked my Mauve Decade stays and plumped down in a porch rocker of a Sunday morning. I loved the birds and squirrels. Particularly the squirrels. There was one little fellow who became quite friendly. I used to hide nuts in the creases of my fat middle and try to sit still while my favorite foraged for his dinner.

We lived in Long Island City four years. Every

INTERIOR VIEWS OF MISS DRESSLER'S HOME

night after the performance, I would take the ferry home. I shall never forget how the ferryman used to watch out for me and protect me. If I missed my accustomed boat, they were as nervous as a bunch of old-maid aunts.

It was the same with the train hands at the other end of the line. In winter, after the tickets had been collected, the conductor, the brakeman, and I would gather around the little pot-bellied stove in the end of the car.

"How'd the show go to-night, Muree?"

"Grand, Joe. How're the twins making out with their measles?"

Joe, Willy, and Alf! I knew all about their families and their problems, and they knew all about mine. We were real friends.

My first season in "Lady Slavey" wound up in a blaze of glory. And now Mother put her foot down: I must have a vacation, a real holiday. I was twenty-six years old and I had traveled thousands upon thousands of miles trouping, but never in all my life had I taken a trip *just for pleasure.*

For days Mother and I pored over resort pamphlets and were bedazzled by the splendors of hotels and watering places. At last we settled on the Marion House at Lake George and went into a perfect orgy of dressmaking. I was as thrilled as

a débutante getting ready for her first party. As for Mother, she confidently expected me to be the belle of the ball. And why not? Wasn't I Marie Dressler, the toast of Broadway?

But, alas, we reckoned without public opinion.

In those days, an actress was an actress, no matter whether she was a Duse or a burlesque queen. And a musical-comedy star — well, almost any committee of citizens would have awarded her a scarlet letter without bothering to go too deeply into her record.

I hadn't unpacked my trunk at Lake George before the place was buzzing with the news that the actress who played *Flo Honeydew* in "Lady Slavey" had arrived. Alas for vacation hopes! I was completely snubbed. I longed to go home, but I knew the truth would break Mother's heart. Grimly I settled down to stay my three weeks if the whole darn lake froze over, and the haughty dowagers who rocked on hotel porches got permanent cricks in their necks from "snooting" me.

Anyway, I always did love a good stiff fight.

At the Marion House, the climax to the day's excitement was the trip down to the docks to see the boats come in morning and afternoon. I stood on the fringe of the crowd, wishing hungrily for a familiar face. If one of my old ferry friends had

turned up I'm sure I should have embraced him publicly.

After one of these lonely trips, I returned feeling more than ever like a leper. Back of the hotel stood a deserted dance hall which I knew housed a piano. The door was unlocked and I went in. Curls of dust blew along the floor.

It was very hot that day and I opened a window before I sat down at the worn old instrument. My fingers strayed among the ancient keys, many of them peeled and blackened by time. I've already told you that music has always been my solace when hurt or lonely. Presently I began to sing.

"Delightful!" murmured a friendly voice at the window. "I wonder if you sing, 'Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms'?"

I looked up to see a sweet old face framed in graying hair.

"It's one of my favorites too," I said. "Won't you come in?"

The little old lady smilingly accepted my invitation. "I live at the cottage above here," she explained. "I was passing and heard your voice."

I don't know how long I sat there, playing and singing to my audience of one. But I do know that much of the bitterness in my young heart was gone when the old lady finally stood up.

"Won't you come home with me for a cup of tea?" she urged. "I should like my daughter to meet you."

On the way up the hill to her cottage, I decided it would not be fair to let her take a musical-comedy actress into her home without telling her the truth. To my great surprise, she did not seem in the least shocked when I told her who I was. I found the daughter almost as delightful as the mother and spent a happy hour with the only two people who had spoken to me voluntarily since my arrival.

It was almost dusk when I got back to the hotel. The verandas were deserted; everybody was dressing for dinner. I climbed the stairs to my room to change too, although I knew only too well that there is little fun in dressing for hostile eyes. At any rate, I had the memory of one perfect afternoon to hug to my heart.

I was stupefied on entering the dining room that evening to find people rising and offering me a place at their tables. "Do come over here, Miss Dressler," invited one overstuffed dowager who had heretofore been unable to distinguish me from a grain of dust. "There's such a nice view of the lake from our window!"

"We've been saving a place for you," besought

a plump, bewhiskered gentleman, whose wife made pleasant little clucking sounds as he drew out a chair for me.

For a moment, I thought I was crazy, that my longing for friendliness had induced the sort of mirage which torments thirsty travelers lost in a desert. I remained dazed all evening, for I was made the center of attention.

The next morning I learned the answer. The gracious old lady who had taken me under her kindly wing that afternoon was the widow of General U. S. Grant! She had introduced herself simply as Mrs. Grant. After my initial experience at the Marion House, it had not occurred to me that anybody so forthright and friendly could be socially prominent, much less a former First Lady.

Since those days, I have numbered among my close friends many of the socially elect on both sides of the Atlantic. I have come to know that warm hearts and coronets are not incompatible, and that simple faith is not impossible to those of Norman blood. But for true graciousness, I still bow to the great lady who befriended me when I was friendless.

Chapter
· VII ·

I NEVER recall my early triumphs in "Lady Slavey" without thinking of my colored maid, Jenny. A few days before we opened in Washington, I realized that I should need a maid and asked the cleaning woman in the theater to recommend somebody. She said, "I know a girl who would be just the one for you."

Jenny applied for the job the next day and I decided to take her at once. It would be more accurate to say that she decided to take me, for from that moment forward, I was never able to call my soul my own. Jenny adored me with an adoration that ignored self. She thought only of me. My life, my success, my money, were hers. She took charge of the few dollars I reserved for personal spending and doled them out as she saw fit.

One day I said, "Jenny, I've got to have a new coat, but I don't know how I'm going to get it."

"Sho' you needs a new coat, an' you gwine git you a good one, too, Honey. I got mos' fifty dollars saved up you doan' know nuthin' 'bout."

Jenny had a witty tongue that occasionally caused discomfiture among my fellow players. I remember one day when we had a long wait in a dull little town. Everybody was bored. A young man who rarely traveled without his flask invited Jenny to have a drink.

Jenny ignored the invitation and the young man.

"Oh, come on now," persisted the young man, "you know you coons never refuse a drink."

Jenny looked him coldly up and down in her best Dressler manner, but still did not speak.

By this time, the young fellow was red behind the ears. He had the grace to say, "My mistake. You'll excuse me, won't you, Jenny?"

"Yes, suh," said Jenny sweetly. "You got a standin' 'scuse with me."

Jenny taught me one thing that will stay with me through life. It was her favorite bit of philosophy and it became mine. She first voiced it when we were discussing buying that much-needed coat for which I insisted I couldn't afford to give more

than twenty-five dollars. Jenny violently disagreed with me.

"Look heah, Honey," she said sternly, "ain't you learnt yit *nuthin's cheap that's cheap?*"

Golden words! Neither coats, nor success, nor happiness can be bought for nothing.

Dear Jenny! All her life she looked forward to a handsome funeral. And when she died, I saw to it that she got it. I took her body back to Washington in a private car. I filled the church with flowers, and I hired a colored choir to sing her beloved spirituals. All the colored élite of Washington turned out to do her honor.

Jenny would have turned over in her grave if she had known that I rode back to New York in a day coach because I had spent almost my last dollar on her funeral.

At the end of my fourth year in "Lady Slavey", I was taken violently ill in Denver and hurried back to New York. To add to my troubles, I was dead broke, for it took every cent I earned to pay my own expenses and keep my family comfortable at home. George Lederer, who owned the show when I started on the road with it, accepted my illness at its face value. Not so Abe Erlanger, who had bought in on "Lady Slavey", as he bought in on every money-maker. That man had a ferret's

nose for smelling out success. And he was cock of the Broadway walk in those days. Any actor who displeased Erlanger was out of luck and out of a job. His power was absolute.

Czar Erlanger was furious when I stepped out of "Lady Slavey." He said I was sick of the sticks and just wanted to get back to the bright lights of New York. I heard he was going to fire me and determined to beat him to it.

I hated to leave George Lederer. He was the most considerate and generous of employers. It was George who paid me a compliment which neither I, nor anybody else, could deserve, but which I cherish the more on that account. Not long ago, he said to a mutual friend, "Marie is the only artist I ever saw who could never be replaced. Once she had played a part for me, I knew I might as well burn it. The public wouldn't stand for another actress in her rôles. There is only one Dressler!"

To that last remark, if he could have heard it, I'm sure Abe Erlanger would have added a fervent "Thank God!"

Abe called me on the carpet about leaving "Lady Slavey" in Denver. "Go ahead and shoot, Abe," I told him. "I'm not afraid of you."

To this observation, I added some choice footnotes explaining in detail what I thought of him

and his high-handed methods. But the Czar had the last word — and the whip hand. For four years he kept every stage door on Broadway closed to me. Such a thing would be impossible to-day. However, I have the satisfaction of knowing that Abe carried to his grave a healthy respect for my tongue.

Years later — in 1919, to be exact — when the great Actors' Equity war was in full swing, something happened which proved it. You remember that all the theaters in New York were closed while the actors battled for fair contracts and a living wage during rehearsals. Up to that time, an actor might rehearse six weeks without pay only to find, when his play opened, that it was a failure and he was on the street with only two weeks' salary for two months' work.

Well, when the fight between actors and managers was at its hottest, somebody tried to persuade Czar Erlanger to head a committee which was to dicker with a representative group of actors. Abe refused even to attend the meeting, much less to accept the chairmanship.

"Why won't you go?" demanded an enraged manager who felt that Erlanger's presence would be impressive.

"I tell you why," said Abe darkly, "that Muree

Dressler, she is on the committee, yes? Vell, I vill fight with the rest of Equity single-handed, but that wildcat of a Dressler, NO!"

It was the out-and-out despotism of Erlanger and certain other old-time managers who delighted in abusing their power that opened the door for the Shubert boys, Sam and Lee. The advent of the Shuberts on Broadway heralded a new day for the downtrodden actor. Hitherto, if any member of the cast incurred the displeasure of the manager, the unfortunate one was likely to find his name blue-penciled. This meant that the irate manager would ever thereafter demand the cast list of a show before booking it. If he found an offending name, he ordered it struck from the pay roll. If this wasn't done, he simply declined to book the show.

A nice little practice worthy of the Spanish Inquisition!

Sam Shubert started producing at the turn of the century. From the outset, he treated his people with eminent fairness. The poorest chorus girl could get a hearing with the Shuberts. This attitude on the part of Sam and Lee earned for them the undying loyalty of the theatrical profession. Actors flocked to their standard. I don't know how these things are on Broadway now, but when the Great White

Way was home to me, the Shuberts could have the pick of the flock.

In spite of the Erlanger displeasure, I was soon offered a part in a William H. Harris production called "Courted Into Court." Of course we had to go on the road with the piece. The Czar saw to that. My rôle was the lead which had been created by May Irwin. The new show was quite successful. It took us all the way to San Francisco and back and landed for me the stellar rôle in "Miss Print", George Hobart's delicious farce.

This was, I think, in 1900.

The following year, I switched to the management of the Sire Brothers, probably the drollest study in contradictions that ever graced Broadway. These hard-boiled lads would listen to any woman's hard-luck story and hand over a couple of hundred dollars without blinking an eye. But God help the best actress in town if she tried to collect for an honest week's work. The Sires could find more excuses than Carter had oats for putting off pay day.

But they did know how to pick actors. Supporting me in "The King's Carnival", in which I made my bow under their banner, were Dan McAvoy, Amelia Summerville, Maybelle Gilman, and many others whose names still echo pleasantly in the hall of theatrical fame. Dan and Amelia are

now dead, but the last time I had news from London, Maybelle Gilman was very much alive. She deserted the stage twenty years ago to play queen to his majesty, the steel king, W. E. Corey, and became prominent in European society.

"The King's Carnival" put me back on Broadway. We opened in the New York Theater. It was here, too, that I played a little later with Sam Bernard.

To this day, I think Sam the drollest, most spontaneous comedian I ever worked with. Charlie Chaplin has more authentic genius, yes, but even the great Chaplin — of whom more later — lacked the trigger-like wit that convulsed Bernard's fellow players. Sam and I played a skit the scene of which was laid on the Madison Square Roof Garden, then the favorite rendezvous of fashionables. When handed to us for rehearsal, this sketch contained only a couple of lines apiece for Sam and me. It started out as a two-minute act, and before any of us knew what had happened, it had grown to a twenty-minute feature. Every night Sam would introduce some new business, and, between us, we would put on a performance that was news to the author, the director, and even to ourselves. People used to shout themselves hoarse encoring us.

I remember our skit went on at a quarter of ten.

At nine-thirty, there would be numerous gaps in the front rows, but when the curtain went up on our turn, the vacant seats were always filled with men in evening dress. In those days, the first six rows in every good show on Broadway were preempted by men about town who liked to refer to themselves as "clubmen."

A few years later, Weber and Fields, already a famous team, quarreled and parted. Joe Weber invited me to join his company then playing "Higgledy-Piggledy", George Ade's inimitable potpourri of nonsense. Here is the cast, taken verbatim from my scrapbook:

WEBER'S MUSIC HALL
JOE WEBER'S
ALL-STAR STOCK COMPANY
in
HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY
A Rigmarole of Fun, Fancy and Foolishness in
One Exhibit
Produced under the Personal Direction of
Joseph M. Weber
Dialogue & Lyrics by Edgar Smith
Music by Maurice Lew

Staged by George Marion
(Courtesy Henry W. Savage)
Dances by Sam Marion

ADOLPH SCHNITZ, *a wealthy mustard manufacturer, touring Europe for rest and recreation*	Joseph M. Weber
GOTTLIEB GESSLER, *a millionaire, President of the American Swiss Cheese Sandwich Trust, a friend of Schnitz and upon a similar mission*	Harry Morris
SANDY WALKER, *a "Rail-bird" with clipped wings*	Charles A. Bigelow
CHARLEY STRINGHAM, *Gessler's nephew and Paris agent*	Aubrey Boucicault
WALDORF LAM, *a New Yorker, friend of Stringham*	Frank Mayne
HERR BAEDEKER, *a courier*	Verne Wadsworth
PIERRE, *a waiter*	Sam Marion
HANS, *a tramp bear*	A. Mendleson

HENRI BATIGNOLES	*Parisian Friends of Stringham*	Harry Hoffman
PIERRE MONTMARTE		W. Douglas Stevenson
JEAN PROCOPE		Robert Austin
HONORE D'ABSINTHE		Richard Dolliver
PROSPER MALHEUR		Jarvis Jocelyn
MAURICE DE MAXIMS		Charles Flynn
JACQUES DE RICHE		Frank Taylor

CHASSEUR AT THE CAFÉ D'ARAMONVILLE	Henry de Packh
MIMI DE CHARTREUSE, *patron saint of the Parisian Bohemia*	Anna Held
PHILLOPENA SCHNITZ, *heiress to her father's mustard millions*	Marie Dressler
GERTIE KEITH *Known in American vaudeville circles*	Aimee Angeles
MAMIE PROCTOR *as the "Little Sparklets"*	Bonnie Magin
FIFINE, *a grisette*	Kay McKenzie

During the New York run of "Higgledy-Piggledy", a very amusing thing happened. The number that I liked best in the show was a silly song I had to sing while Joe Weber (my pickle-king stage father, you remember) was being dangled carelessly over a cliff in the Swiss Alps by a pair of husky guides. The refrain ran like this:

I pray you, spare my father,
Ye hardy mountaineers!
Ah! Let your hearts be tender
And heed a daughter's tears!
I know you will not send him
To meet a fate so sad,
When I have told you he's the only
Pa I ever had!

We had just reached this point in the performance one evening when, to my consternation, I saw a massive figure rise in the third row of the orchestra and heard a familiar voice inquire with great distinctness:

"What about me, Marie?"

"It's Father," I whispered to Joe.

"Your dad?"

I said, "Yes."

The orchestra had stopped playing. All eyes were fastened on me. Obviously the audience thought this was a "plant", a part of the show. Weber took in everything at a glance and his quick wits saved the day. Strolling to the footlights, he leaned over and shouted, "I'll gif her to you, olt man, right after der performance. She's more den I can menach!"

The audience roared with laughter, and Father, much embarrassed to find himself the center of so

much attention, with great dignity made his way down the aisle and out. Of course the audience still thought he was playing a part and applauded him vigorously. As a matter of fact, his appearance in the theater was a greater surprise to me than to any one else. This was his first visit to a playhouse in which I was acting and for a long time it was his last.

For many years Weber and Field's shows at the Weber and Field's Music Hall, south of Herald Square, had drawn capacity audiences. This was due partly to the high type of entertainment provided, but even more to the drawing power of big names. At the time of the split, twenty stars were billed regularly — all names to conjure with forty years ago. Many of them are alive and flourishing to-day. Willie Collier, Senior, and Trixie Friganza are in steady demand in Hollywood. Weber and Fields helped open the great Radio City Music Hall two years ago. Fay Templeton shone in "Roberta", a Broadway hit, all last season, and, for all I know, is still shining in it. Frankie Bailey of the famous legs is living in retirement in Los Angeles. I shouldn't be surprised to see her step into the movies any day.

Lillian Russell, brightest star of them all, has been dead ten years. Pete Daly, the comedian, has

also joined the great throng beyond. Pete Daly was one of the keenest wits of his time. It was he who originated the line about Chicago that was quoted from one end of the country to the other.

"Well, Pete, how do you like Chicago?" somebody asked him after his first engagement there.

"Fine!" said Daly enthusiastically. "Just fine and dandy!"

"What did you like best about it?" persisted his inquisitor.

"The trains running East," blandly replied Daly.

Although we were a small and relatively unimposing company after Weber and Fields separated, we continued to fill the Music Hall and to play to full houses on the road. We owed our success to Joe Weber, who almost more than any man I ever knew understood the delicate art of getting the best out of people. Playing with Weber and myself were dancing Bonnie Magin, Harry Morris, Charlie Bigelow, and Audrey Boucicault, son of Dion Boucicault, the well-known playwright and actor. Audrey was the Clark Gable of his day. Hundreds of sentimental girls and women went to matinées to sigh over his dark wavy hair and cleft chin.

Anna Held, famous for her beauty and her acting as well as for her milk and champagne baths, was the star of the company. Soon the gentlemen

of the press began to hint that I was stealing the show from Anna. I was entirely innocent of any predatory intention, for I had no notion of attempting what I honestly thought was the impossible. I had simply followed the dictum of my old boss, George Baker of the Baker Opera Company: "Play your bit as if the show — *and your job* — depended on it!"

But the rumor that I was stealing the show persisted and presently the news leaked out that Anna was going to leave. I shook in my boots. Joe Weber wouldn't thank me for forcing the great Held out of his company.

One night after the curtain, somebody tapped on my dressing-room door. I said, "Come," and almost fainted when Anna walked in. Before I could pull myself together, she was holding out her hand and smiling in the friendliest manner.

"I've come to say good-bye, Marie," she said. "There isn't room for Dressler and Held in the same show. But there's plenty of room for two companies and two stars. I've just told Flo Ziegfeld if he didn't put you under contract for ten years, he'd lose the bet of his life!"

Ziegfeld passed up the bet of his life and survived very nicely, thank you! Anna Held was a grand sport.

Lew Fields was a fine actor, but he was not always the best sport in the world.

When Joe Weber and Lew kissed and made up, Joe insisted that I stick with the company. I did not enjoy this engagement. Lew and I got along fine when we played in different companies, but we never hit it off when we occupied the same stage.

Lew felt that the laughs belonged to the star and quite properly he was the star. On the other hand, I have always believed that the show is the thing. No star is strong enough to carry a production for a long run. A star who subscribes completely to my theory is Lawrence Tibbett.

Tibbett has shone successively on the concert stage, in grand opera, and in the movies. When he came out to Hollywood to make the "Cuban Love Song", a busybody warned him that he had better watch out for Marie Dressler. "She's always stealing somebody's picture," said the busybody.

"Gosh," said Tibbett, "I wish I could get her to steal one of mine!"

Lawrence meant that as a tribute to an old woman who was making a comeback after being booted all over the lot by hard luck. In reality, it was a tribute to Tibbett. It shows that he knows how to play ball. And no actor is really great until he has mastered that lesson.

Joe Weber must have been born with it letter-perfect, for he was always the most generous of souls. It was Joe who, on countless occasions, helped me to wrestle with my besetting demon, stage fright.

I shall never forget the night we opened at the Forty-Fourth Street Theater in New York, just after the historic reunion of Weber and Fields. Choice seats sold for sixty dollars apiece. William Randolph Hearst is said to have paid nine hundred and forty dollars for a box. Diamond Jim Brady, the terror of Wall Street and the darling of the old Waldorf's famous Peacock Alley, was there with a bevy of beauties. Society, led by Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish and her glittering coterie, turned out in full force. Indeed, that evening the curtain went up to disclose one of the most brilliant first-night audiences ever assembled in New York.

And out in the wings stood Marie Dressler, a star in her own right, but in her own mind still an awkward gawk from the provinces.

I held on to the stage braces to steady my shaking knees. In an effort to still my chattering teeth, I bit my lips until the blood started. Just as in that faraway night when, an untried youngster of fourteen, I stumbled on the stage in my first part, living terror crawled up my back. I was paralyzed

with fright. Nausea became an active threat. If I could have made my legs move, I should have fled!

Good old Joe saw my plight and suffered for me.

"I can't do it, Joe. I can't go out there and face 'em," I whispered hoarsely.

Joe waited for my cue. When it came, he put his knee in the small of my back and gave me a shove that sent me spinning out upon the stage to the accompaniment of tumultuous applause. Many actors have been kicked off the stage. I'm probably the only one who ever had to be kicked onto it.

It was Joe who used to say that Marie would kill herself for a laugh. He was pretty nearly right, for I frequently suffered the agony of death in trying to vanquish my terror of audiences. I remember only one time in my life when I wasn't afraid. As it turned out, that was the one time I had every reason to be afraid. I'll tell you about that presently.

Looking back upon our years together, I wonder how Joe ever put up with one of my little weaknesses. In those days, I insisted upon doing things for people, no matter whether they wanted them done or not. And I rather fancied myself as a designer and dressmaker, — still do, for that matter. If I were to buy a hat in the best shop in Paris

to-morrow, I couldn't rest until I had put a new quirk in the brim, or turned the whole thing around, hind-part before. It is the same with dresses. I never bought one in my life that I didn't rip it apart and reassemble it on a different plan.

When I was younger, I was that way with other people's clothes too. I remember once Joe had imported a French costumer at a fancy price for one of our shows. And no sooner had the Frenchman got the chorus all dressed up to *his* liking than little Marie trips around from dressing room to dressing room, untying a bow here, adding a ruffle or a feather there, until she gets the chorus dressed to *her* liking.

All went well until the opening night. Five minutes before the curtain, the costumer beheld what had happened to his masterpiece. If Joe hadn't leaped to my rescue, I feel sure I should not now be here to tell this tale. They actually had to lock the irate Frenchman up before they could go on with the show.

And after the performance, Joe made the whole cast sit up until dawn repairing the havoc the costumer swore I had wrought. Only then did they dare let him loose!

Shortly after the Weber and Fields engagements, I got a flattering offer to try my luck in vaudeville

and in the face of much opposition accepted it. My friends all warned me that this was a step backward. "You'll never play Broadway again," they predicted dolefully. An immediate result of the plunge into vaudeville was an engagement of ten weeks straight at Proctor's Fifty-Eighth Street Theater, a run which broke all existing records.

It was at Proctor's that my acquaintance with Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish began. In my act, I carried a basket of onions. All at once it seemed to me an excellent idea to throw them playfully at the spectators. The biggest one of the lot landed squarely on Mrs. Fish's head. When I saw what had happened, I was paralyzed with fright for Mrs. Fish's reputation for arrogance was no secret.

Imagine my surprise when a few days later, I received a note from her secretary, asking me to appear as a paid performer at one of Mrs. Fish's famous parties. I accepted. When I reached her house on the appointed evening, her secretary asked me if I would mind singing my songs at intervals instead of all at one time. Of course, I said that I should be delighted to work as Mrs. Fish wished. I learned that the week before, she had made the same request of a European light-opera star whom she was paying a huge sum of money to entertain her guests. The artist had haughtily refused.

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ANNA HELD AND A GROUP OF STARS

Of course, you know, these were the days when Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish ruled New York society with an iron hand. She was the recognized leader of the Four Hundred. Imperious, generous, brilliant herself, dullness was the one sin that she could not forgive. She demanded that those who sat about her dinner table should be funny, or handsome, scintillating, or like herself, superbly arrogant. It made no difference to her whether their families came over in the *Mayflower* or in the last boat to unload at Ellis Island.

That memorable first evening Mrs. Fish insisted that I dine with her and her guests. There were some startled faces about her board when I was given the place of honor at table. In those days, "professionals" were not asked to dine when they came to entertain. Mrs. Fish and I became firm friends and our friendship lasted through the years until the day of her death. Never again was I a paid entertainer in her home. But I was often her guest, both in New York and Newport.

Mrs. Fish was always making me handsome presents. One evening, as I arrived, she pressed into my hand a handsome gold mesh bag with a hundred-dollar bill in it. During the evening I handed the bag to Frank Crowninshield. "Here, Frank," I said, "hold this a minute, will you? And

hang onto it. When you're with the Four Hundred, you've got to be careful."

Mrs. Fish's laughter led all the rest.

I am sure that one of the things this indomitable soul liked about me was my refusal to take her and her friends too seriously. Another time, she presented me with a jeweled bracelet. "Here, Marie," she said, suddenly taking the gorgeous bauble from her arm, "I'm tired of this thing. You wear it."

Mrs. Fish had humor, courage, naturalness, and honesty. These were the qualities she most admired in others. Above all, she liked courage, even ruthlessness of a sort.

How different she was from many of the socially elect of her day. I recall one grande dame of the Mauve Decade who invited my good friend Fritz Kreisler to dinner, and added, "Oh, Mr. Kreisler, do bring your violin."

"Delighted," said Fritz blandly, "but it will not be necessary to fetch my violin."

"Why not?" demanded the mystified G. D., who was accustomed to make her artist friends sing for their suppers.

"Well, you see, Madame," replied Fritz, "my violin, it does not eat!"

Good old Fritz. How I miss him and the others

with whom I used to foregather in those long-dead days. They used to come often to my place for supper. On countless Sunday nights I tied an apron about my waist and cooked spaghetti, or my planked-steak specialty for Caruso, Godowski, and Fritz Kreisler. At my house they were glad enough to sing for their suppers.

"No sing, no eat," I used to tell them.

Kreisler and his blessed wife keep a room ready for me in their castle in the Black Forest. Shortly after the release of "Emma", they wrote me from Europe: "We have seen 'Emma' three times. We rejoice in it. We are prouder than ever that for so many years you have allowed us to call you friend."

When Mrs. Fish began her reign, actresses were not accepted in society. They were, in fact, considered fast. Especially if they had ever worn tights. But when Mrs. Fish took me driving through the park in her elegant victoria day after day, New York society conveniently forgot my social shortcomings, and I received more invitations than I could accept.

Bessie Stokes, later Mrs. Jules Vatable, and now Madame Terrien and a prominent figure in Monte Carlo and on the Riviera, where she and her French husband maintain a residence, was one of the friends I made through Mrs. Fish. Bessie was the

best woman whip of her day. Tooling a four-in-hand was child's play to her.

I have always adored horses, and as I have already told you, riding in a carriage was to me the epitome of luxury and elegance. Particularly did I thrill to drive beside famous whips like Alfred Vanderbilt, "Fatty" Bates, and James Hazen Hyde. Jimmy Hyde lives very quietly in Paris now. But in those days he was very much in evidence as a financial mogul and as a man-about-town.

Other famous New York beaux of this period whose friendship I enjoyed were Major Dangerfield, Freddy Gebhart, Jack Follansbee, Alfred Henry Lewis, Steve Elkins, O. H. P. Belmont, Moncure Robinson, and Berry Wall, whose flowing collars were the despair of all the young blades giving serious consideration to What the Man Will Wear. I also counted as my good friends the renowned architect, Stanford White, who was killed by Harry Thaw, and Frederick Townsend Martin whose father, the leather goods king, used to call out whenever he sighted me approaching, "Here comes the *Oregon* under full steam!" Freddy Martin used to do a lot of good for which he got little credit, because only a favored few knew anything about it. For years he maintained a comfortable hang-out down in the Bowery for men

who were down on their luck. Lillian Nordica and I used to dress up in our shiniest evening gowns and go down to Freddy's place to sing to his protégés. They always applauded much more vigorously when we dressed up for them. One Thanksgiving Day, when Freddy had provided his guests with a big turkey dinner, Lillian and I dined there. I still remember that day as one of the high lights of my experience. I never had as much attention from as many men in all my life.

I have always liked men. Many of my stanchest friends have been of the male persuasion. But in all my life I have loved only one man. He has been dead for many years. I will not tell you about him, for our love belongs to me alone. But I will tell you something important he taught me. It was this: Love is not getting, but giving. It is sacrifice.

And sacrifice is glorious!

I have no patience with women who measure and weigh their love like a country doctor dispensing capsules. If a man is worth loving at all, he is worth loving generously, even recklessly.

And now I am going to make a confession — an honest one. I have tasted acclaim and found it sweet. I have enjoyed fighting for my little place in the sun. I have thrilled to victory when it came. I would be a liar if I pretended otherwise. But deep

in my heart, I know I should have been happier if I had married a poor man and had six or eight lively youngsters. Less than six would never have satisfied me. Scrubbing and feeding and licking and loving six kids would have used up the restless energy that all my life has driven me. And it would have given me an immortality no childless artist, however great, can ever achieve.

A woman who has borne six children has not one life to live but seven: her own, and those six others. This is true immortality.

Not that I'm grumbling. The business of being a mother is not a strictly biological process. I've managed to find plenty of mothering to do as I went along.

Chapter

· VIII ·

LIKE most comediennes I always yearned to writhe and weep my way across a stage. At the height of my career as a musical comedy favorite, several Englishmen saw in me the makings of a queen of tragedy. When George Edwardes, the Flo Ziegfeld of England, returned to London after a brief visit to America, he reported that he had seen two artists — David Warfield and Marie Dressler.

Edwardes immediately set about finding a play with what he considered a suitable emotional rôle for me. Apparently this was a fatal undertaking, for no sooner had Edwardes chosen a rôle for me than he found himself in financial difficulties which made production impossible. Producers who subsequently were bold enough to offer me tragic parts suffered an even worse fate. Sir Herbert Tree

picked me for tragedy, and immediately gave up the ghost. Augustin Daly made me a similar offer and promptly laid him down to die. No sooner had Louis Calvert planned to present me in a series of Shakesperian tragedies than the Lord decided that he was too good for this world and gathered him to dwell among the angels.

As a matter of cold fact, until talking pictures opened a new field and a new world for me, I had appeared only once in anything except comic parts. During my early days as a trouper, the prima donna of the old Baker Opera Company was taken violently ill on the eve of a performance. With obvious misgivings, George Baker handed me the ermine robes she had worn in "La Pericol."

This was the time I should have been devastated by stage fright and wasn't. Cool as a cucumber, I swept majestically on the stage, confident that this fortunate audience was to witness a performance which it would never forget. I was right. The evening proved a memorable one. But not for the reason I had anticipated.

The chap who played the jailer was much given to tippling. His main job was handling the wardrobe, but he played small rôles on the side. On this momentous occasion, he wandered off among the trunks in the wings and fell into a

drunken slumber. He was dragged forth and kicked upon the stage by the irate manager. The speech with which I was to greet his entrance was, "Jailer, is the prisoner there?" This was his cue to reply, "No! If he makes a move, strong men will come and chain him to the wall."

Clasping my hands to my bosom and lifting my streaming eyes to heaven, I besought tremulously, "Jailer, is the prisoner there?" To which he bellowed the answer, "I don't give a damn if he is. I don't give a damn if the damn show closes!"

The show ended right there, and so, for many years to come, did my career as a tragedienne.

And now comes the first real sorrow of my life — the death of my mother, which occurred while I was desperately ill. Halfway through the successful vaudeville run which followed my engagement with Weber and Fields, I was suddenly stricken with typhoid. For weeks I was unconscious. In lucid intervals, I begged for my mother. I could not understand why she did not come to my room. Not until the fever had left me and I had set a wavering foot on the road to convalescence was I told about her death. She had been in poor health for several years. My seizure, coming like a bolt out of the blue, proved too much for her.

Shortly before I was taken sick, I was asked to

appear in a Sunday-night benefit for some charity. I remembered grumbling at the time that I had been on Broadway ten years and had never had a Sunday night to myself because of the demands for my services in benefits of one sort and another. And now I had coals of fire heaped upon my head, for when I recovered, I learned that my friends had got together and given a monster benefit for me. Half the stars in town appeared on the program. Among the glittering names I recall were those of Maybelle Gilman, Edna Wallace Hopper, who looks almost as young to-day as she did thirty years ago, Fay Templeton, who is a shining light in a current Broadway success, May Irwin, Harry Bulger, Willie Collier, Dan McAvoy, Joseph Cawthorne, Louise Allen, Peter F. Daly, John T. Kelly, Eddie Foy, George Fuller Golden, Hugh Chilvers, Edmund Hayes, Sam Bernard, with whom I had played in "The Ballet's Loose", a burlesque of the famous Ballet Russe, Frank Doane, Edgar Atchison Ely, and Sydney Deane. I remember that Edna Wallace Hopper sang her hit, "Four and Twenty Little Men", and that Fay Templeton did some of the imitations which had made her a Broadway favorite.

When I had convalesced sufficiently to take any interest in my looking glass, I received a minor

shock, for during my illness I had been shorn of my red tresses. My nurse told me that I had protested violently when the doctors ordered my hair to be cut. "It's the only pretty thing about me," I wailed over and over. "Can't you cut something else off?" The papers played up my reluctance to part with my Titian locks. As a result of this publicity, every wig maker in the country wired or wrote to make a bid. The highest bidder turned out to be a well-known theatrical wig maker who offered $125 for my mop. For years afterward, I looked at every red-haired actress I encountered in the shuddering hope that I should recognize my one-time crowning glory.

It was many months before I was able to go back to work. And when I did go back to the stage, my heart was not in it, for I missed my mother bitterly. I dragged along through several minor engagements before I made up my mind that I must have a change of scene. My father wanted to go to England to live with my sister Bonita, who had long since settled there with her handsome and brilliant husband. I hoped that new faces and a new background might help me too.

This was in the early fall of 1907. No sooner had I landed in London, than Sir Alfred Butt, at that

time just plain Alfred Butt, begged me to appear for a few weeks at the Palace. I had already found that idleness gave me too much time for grieving, and I gladly accepted his offer. At the end of the Palace engagement, Sir Oswald Stoll invited me to appear at the Coliseum. At that time, the Palace got the cream of the carriage trade, while the Coliseum was known as a family theater. Imagine how thrilled I was when the Palace audience followed me to the Coliseum. It was a great personal triumph. So great, in fact, that three influential theater men promptly suggested that I put on "Higgledy-Piggledy", which had been such a tremendous success in America.

The Empire Burlesque was so confident that I would repeat my American triumph with George Ade's show that it offered me £300 a week while I was rehearsing. Nevertheless, there were a few wise ones who predicted that a piece so essentially American could have no appeal for a British audience. The gloomy minority was right. The show was a complete flop.

At this juncture I was taken seriously ill and was hurried home for an operation. Before leaving England, however, I insisted that my jewelry and other belongings be pawned, and I borrowed a large sum of money from Sir Oswald Stoll in order

to pay everybody in my company two weeks' salary. When I recovered, I found that none of my bills had been paid, and that the money had apparently done a disappearing act.

In desperation, my friends had put me in bankruptcy. However, I still felt bound morally to make good the losses which had been sustained through me. For years this debt of honor was one of my most serious concerns. Not until *Marthy,* in "Anna Christie", catapulted me into success in the talking pictures was I able to repay it in full. Today, I am happy to say, I do not owe anybody in England a farthing. Nevertheless, I expected to die in debt to England. I can never hope to repay my stanch friends over there for their generosity and loyalty.

The English are a great race and England is a great country. I'm afraid I'm one of those rabid patriots who on the slightest provocation go about yelling, "My country! May she always be right! But right or wrong, my country!" Nevertheless, I am not blind to some things in which we might well take a leaf from the British book.

As a nation, we Americans are all mounted on the fastest hunters. We dash madly about looking for Big Game, completely neglecting the little game which is often more important in the hunt for real

happiness. Fortunately, just when we needed him most, we found ourselves with a courageous and resourceful leader.

I have known Franklin Roosevelt for years. During the World War I worked side by side with him in the Liberty Loan drives. I trust him implicitly — motives and judgment. He is doing his best to pull us up. To make us see sense. If we don't heed him, we are in danger of being destroyed by our crazy appetite for speed and size.

Of all the great nations of the earth, England is in least danger of losing her footing — and her head. She moves ponderously, slowly, yes. But who ever heard of a snail getting stepped on?

It was shortly after my distressing experience in bankruptcy that I was offered the rôle which proved my nearest approach to immortality. This was the part of the boarding-house drudge in "Tillie's Nightmare." For five years, I was *Tillie*. And for many years thereafter, the public remembered me, not as Marie Dressler, but as *Tillie*. For nearly a decade, hardly a day passed that somebody didn't write me, or approach me in person with the request, "Please do another *Tillie*."

Lew Fields saw to it that I was supported by an excellent cast:

LEW FIELDS PRESENTS MARIE DRESSLER in "TILLIE'S NIGHTMARE"

A Mélange of Mirth and Melody in Three Acts. Book and Lyrics by Edgar Smith. Music by A. Baldwin Sloane. Staged by William J. Wilson.

CHARACTERS

Tillie Blobbs, *a Boarding House Drudge*	Marie Dressler
Sim Pettingill, *a Small Town Genius with Metropolitan Aspirations*	Horace Newman
Harvey Tinker, *an Unappreciated Inventor*	J. Clarence Harvey
Smiley Bragg, *a New York Commercial Drummer*	Burrell Barbaretto
Harry Frost, *of the Vaudeville Team, "Frost and Snow"*	George Gorman
Maude Blobbs, *Tillie's Sister, Too Strong to Work*	Octavia Broske
Pullman Leggett, *Foreign Buyer for Pettingill's Emporium*	Virginia Foltz
Peroxa Snow, *Frost's Excess Baggage*	May Montford
Hiram Hay, *a Rube* Broadway Bill, *a Pickpocket* Baron Schwartz, *the German Ambassador*	John E. Gorman
Miss Johnson, *Saleslady at Pettingill's*	Mona Desmond
Miss Thompson, *Another Saleslady* Vera Shapeleigh, *a Chorus Girl*	Marie Fanchonetti
Mrs. Crouch, *a Shopper*	Lotta Uart
Mrs. Rush, *Another Shopper*	May Brennan
Sir Harry Ditchwater, *English Ambassador* Bluffer, *a Hotel Porter* Dr. Suave, *of Pettingill's* Captain Fitzherbert, *of the "Tillie"*	Sam Deane Lou Quinn
Swipesy, *a Newsboy*	James Grant
Count Raviola, *Italian Ambassador*	Bernard Lyons
Reuben Ketchum, *American Ambassador* Sam Singer, *a Shopper*	Carl Gordon
Baron Koffupski, *Russian Ambassador*	J. C. Breeze
General Cabanas, *Spanish Ambassador*	Barry Delancy
General La Roche, *French Diplomat*	Leslie Elliot
Policeman 4–11–44, *of the Traffic Squad*	George Gorman
Jean, *a French Waiter* Hustle, *a Chauffeur*	Selwyn Joyce
Bob Upton, *a Shopper*	Harry Swift

From the outset, I reveled in the part of *Tillie,* the grubby boarding-house Cinderella. One of the reasons I had such a grand time was because *Tillie* gave me an excuse to enjoy another orgy of dressmaking such as had not come my way since my memorable excursion to Lake George. The rôle called for an extensive wardrobe, running all the way from rags of the poor little down-trodden kitchen wench to the delectable creations which clothed her dreams.

You remember I was "broke" when illness forced me to shake the dust of London from my reluctant feet. I was much worse off now, for in the meantime I had undergone a serious throat operation. I hadn't any money and I had to have a lot of clothes. There was only one way to get them and that was to make them.

This I proceeded to do.

I recall one item of what the papers spoke of with proper reverence as "Miss Dressler's gorgeous collection of Paris creations." It was a silver coat composed of yards upon yards of silver lace. I wore it over a stage wedding gown of pink velvet. And if I do say so as shouldn't, Lillian Russell in her palmiest days never boasted anything more frou-frou.

For years after my dressmaking venture with

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY, 1908

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY, 1921, 1930

Tillie, I made all my own clothes and those of many of my friends. I still like to sew. I never use a pattern. I simply take a squint at my intended victim, squat down on my heels with the material on the floor in front of me and my eager scissors in my good right hand. Once the garment is cut out, I lie down flat on my stomach and stitch her up. From this point on, my conscience is my guide. At that, my things must have turned out pretty well, or else my friends were gluttons for punishment in the old days. They kept right on begging me to sew for them.

Even after I was able to afford "store boughten" clothes, I continued to be my own designer and dressmaker. Not only do I love to flourish a needle, but I loathe fittings.

Another advantage I have over the professional *couturière* is that I can cut and make a frock in a couple of hours. Once, when I was spending some weeks with Lady Colbrook in Italy, she said, "That's a darling frock you have on, Marie. If I weren't so busy with my painting, I'd have one made like it."

Pleased and flattered, I offered to make her a dress like mine if she would run out with me and select the goods. We were sitting at the breakfast table when this conversation took place. At ten

o'clock we dropped into a little shop we both liked, chose a printed silk and by ten-thirty were back at home.

Now the Italians were snails for speed before they got Mussolini on the job. Under the old régime, you grew gray and infirm while waiting for a gown your dressmaker had promised to deliver "in a few days, Signora." Therefore when Lady Colbrook, attired in the dress I had run up for her between breakfast and luncheon, returned to our shop with me that afternoon to buy more silk for another frock, the shopkeeper looked as if he were seeing things. Only his native politeness restrained him from commenting. I made the second frock that afternoon, and the following morning we went back, Lady Colbrook decked out this time in gown number two, to purchase a third length of material. This time our little shopkeeper's eyes fairly bulged out of his head. "Madame must keep many dressmakers busy," he stammered.

When Alice Colbrook explained that her eccentric American friend had performed all these marvels, he could no longer hold himself in. Margherita, his plump, voluble wife, must be called in to behold the miracle-worker. Thus, overnight, as it were, I became the wonder of all Venice. If

I hadn't had a fat contract in sight, I feel sure I should have hung out my shingle then and there: Marie Dressler, Dressmaker.

Making hats is another weakness to which I admit. I also confess that I never designed and trimmed one to wear a certain way that I didn't promptly turn it around hind-part-before when I finished it. The more I make over a hat, the better I like it. When I get through with a chapeau, no self-respecting rummage shop would be caught dead with it.

Returning from a trip abroad once, in the hurry of packing, I crammed my large assortment of somewhat battered hats together in a trunk to bring back to be fixed over for the members of a girl's club in which I was interested. When the customs men called on me for a declaration, I replied that I had nothing to declare. However, the inspector had spied my trunkful of hats and when he got to it, I noted a hopeful gleam in his eye. No sane woman would be fetching back twenty or thirty old hats from Europe. Undoubtedly I was a sly puss of a milliner who was trying to slip something over on him.

With a triumphant leer, he delved down into that trunk. After erecting a sizable barricade of wrecked hats in front of him, he turned upon me

with a contemptuous, "Well, lady, I guess you ain't got nothin' to declare!"

After "Anna Christie" was released, several persons wrote in to ask where on earth the studio found that "broken-down hat Miss Dressler wore as *Marthy*." One woman said: "It was perfect. That hat alone was sufficient to establish *Marthy* as a besotted old hag." Besotted old hag, indeed! That was one of my own hats. I still have it, and there's a lot of good wear left in it, too!

When a woman gets to talking about clothes, she doesn't know when to stop. Here I started out to tell you about my part in "Tillie's Nightmare", and I've digressed to Europe and back.

"Tillie's Nightmare" was real comedy.

Lew Fields, backed by the Shuberts, managed the production. Like many great successes, the show seemed doomed to fail when we opened in Albany. Half of the cast were so poor that they received notices at once. I saw there was no chance for the piece unless it was rewritten. Because I believed in it, I offered to take on the job of revision.

When we reopened in Kansas City, we packed the house. Everybody was happy except the original authors, who wired bitter complaint to Lee Shubert. They demanded that he close the show.

Lee promptly passed the buck to Lew Fields. And Lew, who always got on famously with me when we weren't both trying to occupy the center of the same stage, replied that he couldn't close without running the risk of being sued by the whole company, including Dressler, whose contract called for fifteen hundred a week.

By this time we had jumped to Pittsburgh. Lew was sent down to look us over and determine, if possible, why the piece was infuriating the authors and simultaneously playing to huge and enthusiastic audiences. After witnessing one performance, he 'phoned the home office to shoot Ned Wayburn right down to fix us up for a New York showing. "We'll make it a Broadway hit," he promised.

I was thrilled but apprehensive. I thought I knew what the public wanted of *Tillie*.

Ned appeared and revised as ordered. But somehow the thing seemed to lose ginger. The audience went lukewarm on us. A lot of people wrote in, demanding the Dressler version. And when we finally opened in New York at the Herald Square Theater, it was with the show in which we had scored such a big hit on the road.

The part of *Tillie* which I enjoyed most — and I hope I may be forgiven for saying it was a favor-

ite with the audience too — was my song, "Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl." From Bangor to Spokane, and from Boston to Miami, it was on every lip. If ever a song had an immortal soul, this one did. Here it is:

A village maid was leaving home, her eyes with tears was wet,
Her mother dear was standing near the spot.
She says to her — "Neuralgia, dear, I hope you won't forget
That I'm the only mother you have got.
The city is a wicked place, as any one can see,
And cruel danger round your path may swirl,
So every week you'd better send your wages home to me,
For Heaven will protect the working girl.

"You are going far away
But remember what I say,
When you are in the city's giddy whirl;
From temptations, crimes, and follies,
Villains, taxi-cabs, and trolleys,
Oh — Heaven will protect the working girl."

Her dear old mother's words proved true, for soon the poor girl met
A man who on her ru-in was intent;
He treated her respectful, as villains always do,
And she supposed he was a perfect gent.
But she found different when one night he lured her out to dine
In a table-dotey, blithe and gay;

And he said to her — "Now after this, we'll have a demi-tasse."
Then to him the brave girl these words did say:

"Stand back there, villain, go your way.
Here I will no longer stay;
Although you were a Marquis or a Earl
You may tempt the upper classes
With your villainous demi-tasses,
But Heaven will protect the working girl!"

"Tillie's Nightmare" was another Cinderella story, but with a difference. Poor *Tillie* served as a drudge in her mother's boarding-house while her beautiful sister, *Maude,* basked idly in the sunshine of her own and her mother's approval. But unlike the Cinderella of story-book fame, *Tillie* only dreamed of her fine escape from drudgery.

Chapter

· IX ·

TILLIE'S success piled up the dollars for me, as it did for everybody else connected with the show. Not only was I able to pay the most pressing of my debts, but for the first time in my life, I managed to get a few shekels ahead. One Sunday morning, while motoring through the Berkshires, I saw and fell in love with a white Vermont farmhouse. It was the sort of home I had never had and consequently yearned for. When I found it was for sale, I threw discretion to the winds, waved an airy hand and said, "Wrap it up, please. I'll take it home!"

Heaven help me, I did!

And here began one of the most strenuous chapters in my entire career. You city farmers will know what I mean. Work as hard as I could, make

money as fast as I would, I was never able to keep up with the constantly mounting expenses of that modest little white elephant I had wished on myself.

Unfortunately, I took my farm seriously. There were sixteen stalls in the barn. I bought a cow for each stall. I can see them now. Sixteen placid-faced bossys with but a single thought — fodder! Deceptively sleek and satisfied-looking, each one was equipped with the appetite of a starved boa constrictor. But unlike the constrictor, they never seemed to get full enough to stop and think things over.

However, such is the pride of possession, that at the end of the first quarter when I received a statement from my farmer showing that my sixteen cows had earned ninety dollars for me, I almost died of joy. Not only that, but I bored my friends with long-winded accounts of the right mash to induce a high percentage of butter fat.

But I never told anybody about the bill which followed on the heels of the statement of sales. It stated with painful clarity that it had cost me exactly $201 to feed my pastoral beauties while they were making $90 worth of butter!

In spite of this discouraging anticlimax, I clung to my dairy herd as a child clings to its illusions.

What's a farm without cows? And mine were such fine, impressive-looking creatures. Just to gaze at them basking in the shade of an apple tree was enough to rest my frazzled nerves — that is, when I could keep my mind off their mounting board bill. At the end of two years, their appetite began to outweigh their pictorial value in my mind. About this time, I heard of a man in New Hampshire who craved to acquire some cows. I rode all day and night in order to keep a rendezvous with this potential customer, only to discover that he was broke.

At first, I was adamant. No money, no cows. But when that strong man broke down and told me what *his* farm had done to *him,* my heart melted, as it has a way of doing at the wrong time. I begged the poor chap from New Hampshire to take my sixteen treasures and pay me when he could. He made a down payment of fifty dollars. That was the last I ever saw of the man, the cows, or the rest of the money.

I think I really bought my farm to indulge my life-long love of animals. Before I had been there a month, the place was a veritable menagerie. Chief among my treasures was Theodore Roosevelt, the eccentric horse that Mother had cherished. Then there were Brandy and Soda, the handsome iron-

gray team I had acquired theoretically to do the heavy farm work. As a matter of fact, they spent most of their time being fed, and groomed, and driven along country lanes by their proud owner. The farmer who ran the place for me was always grumbling because he couldn't get the hauling and plowing done.

For sheer, unadulterated amusement, I recommend chicken raising. As a means of increasing one's income, it is a doubtful pastime, but for fun it can't be beat. Introducing whole broods of powder-puff chicks into the world makes you feel as if you actually had a hand in creation. You provide the eggs; the hen does the rest. However, there was one stubborn biddy on my place who refused to coöperate. She nearly wore me out before she decided to call the game a draw.

One spring morning I found her clinging pettishly to her nest and concluded that she wished to raise a family. Obligingly, I secured a fine setting of eggs and plumped her down on them. She left in a huff. I pursued her to her new nest and presented her with a fresh outfit of eggs. She left again. It got to be a game of hide-and-seek with us. Topsy was a regular Broadway hussy; she simply could not tie herself down to home duties. She had ruined half a dozen settings of eggs when I caught her

sneaking off the seventh nest I had fixed for her. By this time, I was mad. Picking up that pullet, I gave her a good spanking where I thought it would do the most good. She seemed to realize that I meant business. After that, she settled down contentedly and in due course brought into the world fourteen very fine ducks!

This gave me an idea. I would branch out and try my hand at ducks and geese. I had the creatures quacking and squawking all over the place when I was called away for a season on the road. Upon my return, I found one duck and one goose. Being very fond of Bud Fisher's comic-strip characters, I called them Mutt and Jeff. As the sole survivors of hundreds of ducks and geese, Mutt and Jeff were badly spoiled, and like most spoiled young things, they took constant advantage of our weakness for them. The chickens were forbidden to roam the garden or lawn. Not so Mutt and Jeff. They made friends with the cats and dogs, wandered in and out of the back door and the front one, and otherwise made themselves at home. Their antics kept us in gales of laughter.

When the weather got very hot, Jeff (the goose) would have fainting spells. She behaved exactly like a mid-Victorian lady going off with the vapors. The minute Jeff keeled over, I would rush out with

a pail of water and douse the poor creature with it. Meanwhile, Mutt (the duck) would sit down by her stricken friend and wait for her to come to. As soon as Jeff had recovered sufficiently, these two strange companions would set out for a stroll about the premises.

One day the cook said, "Miss Muree, doan' you think I better kill off some dem older fowls to make room for de new broods comin' 'long?"

I admitted that this was a sensible notion. But when I got in from the road one Sunday at noon, to find the table groaning beneath the burden of a fine bird that even in its trussed and browned state still managed to convey something of Jeff's proud nonchalance, I couldn't stand it.

"Take it away," I cried. "We can't eat Jeff!"

Indeed, I was so upset at the thought of poor Jeff's inglorious end that I couldn't choke down my favorite dessert of peach roly-poly.

Even Toby, my laughing parrot, who had made so much fun of the tender affection of Mutt and Jeff, seemed sorry now for poor lonely Mutt. I acquired Toby in Seattle when we played "Tillie's Nightmare" there. He was my traveling companion for three years on the road, and was a source of unceasing amusement and chagrin to the whole company. His pet trick when we reached a hotel

was to grab the room telephone and shriek into it, "Hello, you sap, give me the bar!"

In the beginning he accompanied me to the dining room. If he fancied a tidbit on my plate, he would cry exactly like a baby until he won his point and then he would laugh in my face. And his horrible peals of mirth were enough to make women faint and strong men shudder. They attracted so much attention that I was forced eventually to have all my meals served in my room, for that wily bird hated solitude and refused to eat unless I was present.

Toby adored music. In my dressing room at the theater, he would cock his head on one side and listen eagerly for the music to start. If there was too much talk to suit him, he would ruffle his wings in disgust and mutter, "Shut up! Shut up!" When the orchestra struck up, his delight was pathetic. He would dance around and around the room, carolling at the top of his voice, "Oh, Mother! Oh, Mother!" What this rhapsody meant, or where he picked it up, I have no idea.

I took Toby several times to hear Tetrazzini. After each visit he would practice for hours imitating the prima donna's voice and mannerisms. Amusingly enough, he taught himself to sing in a manner recognizable as a take-off on Tetrazzini.

She was a good sport and thought it all great fun.

Toby wasn't the only member of the family who loved to mimic the diva. My burlesque of her in the famous death scene of "La Traviata" proved one of the biggest hits in my whole repertoire of imitations. Tetrazzini and I have been devoted friends for years. While I was making my protracted tour in "Tillie's Nightmare" we used to spend all our spare time together when we hit the same town. Once when we happened to land in St. Louis at the same time, Luisa declared that she wanted to see my show. I got her a box and she came dressed up like Astor's pet horse. That evening I don't know which drew the lion's share of attention, the performance on the stage or the handsome bejewelled prima donna in her box. I was a little uneasy about my burlesque of her, but I resolved not to put on the comedy with a light brush just because she was present. I needn't have worried. She nearly exploded with laughter. But always thereafter, she refused to see me in that scene.

"It would ruin my performance, Marie," she declared, wiping away tears of mirth. "I could never again die in a proper grand-opera manner, for always there would be the irresistible impulse to do it the way you do!"

Dear Tetrazzini! I have not seen her often of late and I have missed her and her glorious voice.

But I have not finished telling you about that rascal Toby.

When the weather was too bitter, I left Toby at the farm while I was on the road. I'm afraid the servants took indifferent care of him, for once when I returned after two weeks' absence, he greeted me with painful solicitude. "Poor boy!" he croaked. And then, "Are you cold? Are you cold? Poor old boy!"

Toby's passion for music was so great that I bought a canary to keep him company when I had to leave him. The relationship between the two birds left much to be desired. When I taught the canary to hop about the table, drawing a little paper cart in which he hauled me a lump of sugar for my morning coffee, poor Toby was wild with jealousy. As an expression of his contempt for the canary's performance, he used to walk up and wipe his beak on the little bird's feathers.

Things had now reached such a pass that I was afraid to take Toby with me and I was afraid to leave him at home. I felt much the same way about the farm. When I was gone, the place seemed to run down like an unwound clock. I still loved my white Vermont farmhouse, my rocky acres, and

my assorted menagerie with a great love. But more and more, it was borne in upon me that an actress who must spend half her time on the road has no business trying to make a home for a lot of helpless animals. Still I could not make up my mind to part with the place. It took the World War to make me do that.

When "Tillie" closed after a phenomenal five-year run, I decided to put on a show of my own. I wrote the piece, directed it, and christened it "Marie Dressler's Merry Gambol." With the exception of the merry, it was well-named. I put a mint of money into the production and it turned out to be a first-rate flop in New York. Later, however, I took it to San Francisco, where it enjoyed a nice run.

It was during the San Francisco engagement that I first met Frances Marion, now famous the world over as a scenario writer. Then she was a cub reporter and I was the star of a successful play. I can see her this moment, — a slim, big-eyed girl of seventeen, shy as an antelope and just as graceful.

Her interview with me was her first assignment. Her family had lost everything in the earthquake of 1906 — I mean the fire, of course! — and Frances had had to go to work when she had expected to go to college, or to wander about Europe.

I remember it was raining cats and dogs that day, a regular California downpour. And the child had come out without wraps or umbrella. I had no umbrella, but I had a coat. In those days, I was even bigger than I am now. And Frances, well, she was even smaller than she is now, — about the size of a cake of soap, after a week's washing.

She was simply lost in the coat which I insisted upon wrapping about her. I stood at the window and watched her struggle up Market Street. Once a gust of wind come along, got under her coat, and bellied it up like a sail. I almost expected to see coat and girl flying away over the dripping roofs. As I watched her fight to keep her footing, I thought to myself, "If I had a daughter, I should want her to be like that — a thoroughbred!"

Our lives did not cross again immediately, but I doubt if I should be in Hollywood to-day if Frances Marion and I had not met in a San Francisco hotel twenty years ago.

When we stored the "Merry Gambol", I found myself verging on a nervous breakdown. My doctor ordered me to Los Angeles to rest and bask in the sunshine. It was here that one of the most important episodes of my life had its beginning. One afternoon, in company with my nurse, I dropped into a neighborhood picture house. As we passed

through the lobby, I noticed one of a pair of men staring at me oddly.

"Hurry, let's get inside," I whispered to my companion. "That's a Broadway exile who's stranded and wants to bum his fare back to New York. He's trying to get up his nerve to speak to me."

When we came out after the performance, we found the two men waiting outside the theater door. The one I had first noticed approached me with a sort of desperate diffidence.

"Miss Dressler," he said, jerking his head in the direction of his wild-eyed companion, "we'd like to talk to you a minute."

I told him I'd see them at my hotel, for I was still weak and trembly and not equal to the ordeal of standing long at a time. When they presented themselves in my sitting room ten minutes later, I discovered that the wild-eyed one was Mack Sennett, and that the spokesman for the pair was Bauman of Keystone Pictures. They were so full of themselves they both talked at once, and at first I could not make head or tail of what they said. Finally, I found out what they were driving at. They wanted to make good pictures that would take them into first-rate houses. They thought they could break into first-string theaters if they had my name in the cast.

Of course I did not take pictures seriously. Nobody did, twenty years ago. But I thought it would be fun to fool around with this new plaything. I told Sennett and Bauman I would join them if they made me a satisfactory offer. The next day the pair returned with their plan all worked out. I was to own half the picture when made. It was to be leased but never sold. They were to send me a weekly statement. Nothing could be fairer than that.

At my suggestion, we decided on "Tillie's Punctured Romance" for our first fling. The old Cinderella theme again, with plenty of tears behind the laughter. Now for actors. Instantly there leaped into my mind the name of a young chap I had seen in London several years before. I knew that boy had genius, that he would some day be acclaimed a star. I had run across him a few days before in Hollywood. Now I started a great hue and cry:

"Where is Charlie Chaplin? I want Charlie Chaplin!"

Everybody thought I was crazy. Maybe I was, but I knew what I knew. And I knew that Chaplin could act. He was an enormous success in "Tillie." I'm proud to have had a part in giving him his first big chance. To this day I regard him as the prince of comedians.

When we finished the picture fourteen weeks later, the whole cast cried because it was all over. We thought we were good and we confidently expected others to think so too.

But for a while it looked as if our dream of success with the production was as badly punctured as Tillie's romance. In New York, I saw the film peddled about for nine long months. As fast as it was shown in projection rooms, it was turned down. Nobody would take a chance on it. We had just about given up hope when at last we got a favorable hearing and a showing in a decent theater.

The picture was a tremendous success! Lines blocks long stood patiently waiting to get tickets. Every house that showed the film did a record business. The dignified "Encyclopædia Britannica" says of "Tillie's Punctured Romance", "The first multi-reel comedy . . . it upset screen traditions." There were three rôles:

The Country Girl . . .	Marie Dressler
The Stranger	Charles Chaplin
The Other Woman . . .	Mabel Normand

During the three months we worked together, I learned to love and respect Mabel Normand. She had courage; and courage, perhaps, is the quality I admire most. Many times I've known Mabel to

run the risk of losing her job by disagreeing with her director on the way a certain bit should be played. "Of course, I'll do as you want," she would conclude, "but I do not *feel* the character that way."

One of the nicest things about "Tillie's Punctured Romance" was the fact that it brought Frances Marion across my path again. I was dashing madly across the lot one morning in search of Charlie Chaplin when I bumped into a girl so hard that I knocked her down. I picked her up, dusted her off, and discovered to my delight that she was the pretty child who had interviewed me in San Francisco on that rainy day a few months before.

"Hello, there," I said, "I thought you were in 'Frisco."

"I'm doing film publicity now," she told me with shy pride.

"Good!" I said. "Come and do some about a boy who's going to be the world's greatest comedian."

She came, she saw, and Charlie conquered. So far as I know, Frances gave Chaplin his first real boost in print.

Eight men have told me that "Tillie's Punctured Romance" built their theaters. An old, old story! Who can count the brilliant theatrical successes

that gathered dust for months in some forgotten cubbyhole of a producer's desk? My brother-in-law, Richard Ganthony, once told me that his big hit, "A Message from Mars", was pigeonholed in Charles Frohman's office seven years before it saw the light of production.

Speaking of Charles Frohman never fails to remind me of Charles Dillingham, probably because the two Charlies used to own a country place together somewhere out in Westchester. I ought to hold a grudge against Dillingham, for he once fired me from a good job. Unfortunately, however, just when I made up my mind to get good and mad at him he always said something silly that put me in a good humor in spite of myself. Shortly after he fired me from the cast of "The Century Girl" — my act was pretty rotten, but then so was the whole show — I was motoring near White Plains and practically bumped into Charlie.

"Hello, there, Marie," said he, bringing his car alongside mine.

"Hello, Charlie," I said. "I hear they're thinking of putting your name in the Social Register, now that you've got a place with a lake on it."

"Lake!" spluttered Charlie. "Lake! Sure I had one, Marie, but some sneak came along with a sponge and stole it!"

What can you do with a man like that?

With the triumph of "Tillie" assured, I could have had my pick of screen or stage rôles. But about this time, America plunged into the World War. Always a scrapper, I wanted to fight for my country. They wouldn't let me tote a gun, so I joined up to sell Liberty Bonds.

And now began a new world for me.

My life, like all Gaul, is divided into three parts. Part One ended when the War began. Up to this time, I had been a hoyden. True, I had had responsibility, but it had not sobered me. My high spirits had been my safety valve, as well as a part of my stock in trade. My immense vitality had driven me to never-ending activity. I had no particular philosophy to give my life shape and meaning.

For thirty years, America had looked at me. Now I looked at America. Straight into the honest, throbbing heart of America. And what I saw there made me burn with a passion to give, give, give! I began to live for others, and all unwittingly to find my own soul. . . .

Chapter

· X ·

I NEVER worked so hard in my life as I did during the Liberty Loan campaigns, and I never got so much joy out of work. In one drive I made one hundred and forty-nine speeches in twenty-nine days, speaking not once to an audience of less than five thousand. And when the Armistice was declared, I had the satisfaction of having sold more bonds than any other individual in the United States.

The moment America plunged into the War, I offered my services to the powers-that-were at Washington. I wanted to go to France as an entertainer, but Uncle Sam wanted me to stay home and peddle Liberty bonds.

At first, I refused to be reconciled. So did the boys for whom I had sung at various training camps. They did what they could, those lads of

mine, to show me their hearts were in the right place where I was concerned. One of the first detachments to land in France named a street and a cow for me. The reason for the first compliment still eludes me.

The boys had a lot of fun with my bovine namesake. She gave so much rich sweet milk and cream that one company was always stealing her from another. Company A would march off one morning secure in the possession of Dressler, only to find when they returned to their billets that she was contentedly munching fodder in Company B's stable!

One bright day I woke up to find headlines screaming, "Marie Dressler Killed in Line of Duty!" The text beneath explained that it was the cow and not the actress who had been felled by the enemy. Nevertheless I had a hard time convincing people that the report of my death had been greatly exaggerated.

I have already said that the War marked a distinct break in my life. Up to this time, I had paraded about on a stage while people looked at me and my antics. Now, from a stage, I looked at people. And what I saw in my fellow-Americans filled me with unconquerable faith in them and in their destiny. We may follow after false gods for a while, but we always return to our ancient loy-

alties. In these troubled times, I refuse to be downhearted. America will pull through, for Americans — the real ones — are sound at bottom. We must be. We cannot have changed completely since 1917.

Some of my war-time experiences I cannot recall now without tears. Once when I was making a speech, a blue-eyed young marine strode up to the edge of the platform, took a big wad of greenbacks of small denomination from his pocket, and handed the roll to me.

"For a bond," he said gruffly, and turned on his heel.

"But," I called after him, "where shall I send it?"

His hard young mouth quirked into a smile, he lifted a shoulder, spread his hands in a cynical gesture. "Who knows?" he said and disappeared in the milling crowd.

There were dozens of similar experiences.

But most touching of all was the little old lady of seventy-odd whom I encountered in the great redwood country in California. She was the postmistress in a tiny village ninety miles from the nearest railroad. Out there, there were no waving flags, no bands; just their own hearts to urge the people to patriotism.

My little old lady devoured every scrap of war

news that came her way. She had no sons to give to her country, but she was eager to serve. Somewhere she had read the President's request to conserve oil. From that day, she refused to burn a drop in her little glass lamp. She got up at the crack of dawn so that she might have daylight by which to mend the clothing of the miners for whom she washed and ironed, in order to earn money to buy War Savings Stamps.

It was the stamps that brought us together.

After she had listened to me talk in the schoolhouse, she came up and said timidly:

"I got a sight o' them stamps you bin talkin' about, Lady. I'd like to presarve 'em some way. Wonder, could you tell me what sort o' frame to buy to set 'em off proper?"

The valiant old soul hadn't the faintest notion that the stamps possessed a money value. She wanted to frame them and hang them on the wall to remind herself that she had done her mite for her country!

One of the perquisites of my Liberty Loan work was the privilege it gave me of going in and out of the White House during war time without a pass. Not that a visit to the Executive Mansion was a novel experience for me. I have been running in and out of the White House for thirty-

five years. Unless the Franklin Roosevelts have moved it in the past few months, I know perfectly well where to find the ice box.

Beginning with Cleveland, I have met and talked with seven Presidents and dined with five. I have no vivid impression of my meeting with Mr. Cleveland nor with his successor, McKinley. But I recall as plainly as if it were yesterday my introduction to Theodore Roosevelt. Of all the personalities I have encountered in public or private life, his was the most vigorous and magnetic.

Along with a dozen others, I was awaiting the President in the anteroom adjoining his office. Suddenly the door swung open and Mr. Roosevelt strode in. I was farthest away from the door. His back was turned to me as he hurried from person to person, wringing each by the hand and exclaiming heartily, "Dee-lighted! Dee-lighted!"

I couldn't take my eyes off his strong neck, as it inclined in greeting in his rapid journey around the semicircle. His movements were so quick, so sure and decisive. And yet, he was the soul of cordiality. I watched him with curiosity and amazement. At last he got to me.

"Well, well, Miss Dressler," he snapped, his teeth showing in that famous smile of his, "now that we meet, what do you think of me?"

I answered truthfully, "I think you have the strongest-looking neck I ever saw!"

He roared with laughter.

President Taft endeared himself to me for two reasons: First, for his deep rumbling chuckle which seemed to start in a subterranean cavern and work itself gradually to the surface; and, second, for his courage in making a joke of his size. He used often, I am told, buy a pair of seats for himself when he was attending an entertainment. I wonder if he ever reached the theater to find his two seats on different sides of the aisle!

I found Woodrow Wilson somewhat unapproachable, but his wife and charming daughters always made up for his lack of warmth. Warren Harding was the complete antithesis of Wilson. Pleasant speeches came easily to him. Too easily, perhaps. His desire to please was no doubt his greatest weakness, both as President and as man. Yet nobody can deny his charm. When his secretary started to present me, Mr. Harding waved aside the formal introduction.

"You don't have to tell me who Marie Dressler is," he smiled, "I've seen her in everything she ever did."

My long friendship with Franklin Roosevelt began when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy

and we were both stumping the country in the Liberty Loan drive. Those were the days before his tragic illness. He was a brilliant young man, charming and able. But he was not the selfless man he is to-day.

Long years flat on his back gave him time to read and think. Time to grow mentally and spiritually. Many men would have emerged from such an experience crippled in soul and embittered to find life interrupted so cruelly at high tide. Not so Franklin Roosevelt. In my poor opinion, it was that terrible illness which made him President of the United States. That, and the remarkable woman who is his wife.

Early in his convalescence, I'm told, Mrs. Roosevelt went to the hospital where he was being treated.

"Franklin," she said, "can you move your leg?"

"No, Eleanor."

"Can you move your foot?"

"No, Eleanor."

"Can you move a toe?"

The big man on the bed shook his head.

"Oh, yes, you can, Franklin. You can wriggle a toe if you try hard enough."

And she stood there by his side until he moved a toe. A few weeks later, he could move all his

toes. Then the foot of the stricken leg. And so on, inch by inch, until a splendid victory was won.

Last fall, I spent a week-end at the White House. Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt welcomed me with that simple friendliness which is their nature. The President is human. He has made some mistakes. No doubt he will make others. But there is one thing of which I am as certain as I am certain that God is Love. It is this: Franklin Roosevelt is ruled by one thought and one prayer — to lead the country wisely and safely out of what has been a hideous mess. He has made a heroic beginning. I believe he will take us all the way — if we have the courage and faith to go where he leads.

The War over, I found another cause waiting for me to espouse. This was the famous Actors' Equity strike of 1919. Because I had started my career as a chorus girl, I was elected to head this division of the actors' army militant. We broke the producers' trust and won the fight for fair play, not without some amusing incidents to lighten the grim work. My friend, Karl K. Kitchen, had his little laugh at me.

"There is no question," he wrote in his column, "that Miss Marie Dressler proved a heroine, and an ample one. Indeed, she is of the stuff that two or three heroines could be made!"

RANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, MARIE DRESSLER, CHARLIE CHAPLIN, DOUGLAS AIRBANKS AND MARY PICKFORD AT A LIBERTY LOAN DRIVE IN 1918

When I canceled my bookings to work for Uncle Sam, I was getting $2500 a week in vaudeville, — a pretty penny. I had saved a little and I was proud to be able to defray my own expenses in the campaign. When my bank account gave out, I hurried East and sold my Vermont farm. The Armistice found me broke, except for a few Liberty bonds. But I was undismayed. I had always earned a lot of money; I could earn a lot more.

It is those who inherit money that part with it most reluctantly. They say, "When this is gone, there isn't any more." People who make money slowly and by dint of great labor have a proper respect for it also. They save. When old age comes, their nests are neatly feathered. It is the quick easy earners who are the greatest spendthrifts. They say, as I did, "I made it once. I can make it again." A form of egotism to which the artistic temperament is peculiarly and unhappily liable!

The first hint of trouble ahead came when my agent returned from a round of the booking offices with a long face. "Miss Dressler," he said apologetically, "they say you have been out of the running for several years. That you have probably — er — deteriorated."

"All right," I said. "Go back and ask 'em how much I have deteriorated."

"They say they'll give you $1500 a week," he said timidly.

"Tell 'em we'll take it," I said.

I played the Palace three weeks, and the audiences were as enthusiastic as ever. But the producers and the bookies had got an idea in their heads: The post-war world, they told each other solemnly, wanted youth and beauty and love. And they wanted it straight! No homely old women to clutter up the scene.

I was prepared to point out that *I* had never been pretty and that my great success, in "Tillie's Nightmare", had come when I was thirty-eight. But I never got a chance. As I went in the front doors of offices, managers — men who had begged for the privilege of paying me thousands of dollars a week — went out the back door, or down the fire escape.

Only five years before I had been at the top of the heap, with producers running after me. Now I was running after them, but not fast enough to catch up with 'em. They couldn't bear to tell me to my face that I was through, washed up.

I was forty-seven. My life, they said, was behind me. I had no future.

I didn't mind being reminded that I was forty-seven, but I resented the implication that I was

through. I have never been afraid of birthdays. Indeed, I have always applauded Mrs. Page in Barrie's "Rosalind." She admitted to her landlady that she was "forty and bittock", and she spoke of middle age as if it were a pretty word.

To my mind, there's nothing sadder than a girlish forty. The only way to handle age is to accept it gracefully. Have you ever set your teeth in a persimmon that refused to respond to frost? Then you know what I mean!

Fortunately for me, there was somebody left in the world who needed and wanted Marie Dressler, even if the managers no longer had any use for her. Hundreds of my soldier boys were now quartered in New York hospitals. Many were in that tedious stage of convalescence that requires entertainment; others were bed-bound for life. They were always begging me to come and play the clown for them. I swapped yarns by the carload, did impersonations of General Pershing and other high officials, and sang all the songs I could recall out of a past full of songs. They liked the singing best of all.

At first I sang gay songs. Loud cheerful ditties to make them forget. But one day a boy with gentle gray eyes and a hard twisted young mouth pulled at my hand as I sat by his wheeled chair.

"Miss Dressler," he whispered, "sing something sad, so we can cry."

I looked more closely at those lads stretched out on their narrow hospital beds. I saw that many of them had suffered more than the loss of an arm or leg. Their spirits were mortally wounded. They were disillusioned. Most of them didn't know it, but they wanted to cry as they had cried at their mother's knee, when pain threatened or the dark shapes of the night crept close. Their troubled souls needed the easement of tears that would wash away bitterness and heartache.

After that I always picked sad songs, that would make them cry. Men are not ashamed to cry over a sentimental old woman singing foolish songs, but they are too proud to weep over their own lost dreams and broken hopes. . . .

My hopes had been shattered too. So we wept together — my soldier boys and I.

Chapter

· XI ·

ONCE I heard a man complain that among the hundred couples with whom he and his wife swapped dinners and jokes, he could count only half a dozen real friends. That man was luckier than he had any right to be. If you have in the world one friend on whose loyalty and devotion you can depend, you should rise up and proclaim yourself blessed. I was blessed far beyond my deserts, for at this trying time in my life when there seemed to be no place for me, a host of the best friends any woman ever had rallied to my support.

First of all, there was Nella Webb.

Nella is a small, dark, animated person with the grace of a humming bird and the persistence of a bull pup. She and I have known each other since the days of my early Broadway success, "Lady Slavey." She had just come up from her native

Georgia then. Young and inexperienced though she was, her prettiness and quick wits soon landed her a job on the stage. Later, when we were both on the road, our lives crossed frequently, and a warm friendship grew up between us.

Even then, Nella showed rare talent for mimicry. Soon she deserted musical comedy and vaudeville to develop a one-woman show of her own. By the end of the War which had left me jobless, she was an internationally known *diseuse* — the most gifted forerunner of Cornelia Otis Skinner in this country. But already she had become fascinated by astrology. Every time she went to Europe, she studied under the great masters of astrology over there. Nella had got the idea from her stars that I, Marie Dressler, dethroned musical-comedy queen, was destined to be the female Emil Jannings of the post-war era. She swore that I had but scratched the surface of my possibilities as a character actress. Without taking me into her confidence, she began to haunt the offices of movie producers. She insisted that I would make their fortunes and my own if only they would give me a chance. The gentlemen were amused. They didn't bother to conceal their amusement.

Eventually, Nella did succeed in hypnotizing a producer into saying he would screen "Tillie's

Nightmare." We were so thrilled when we got the good news that I rushed out and bought two lengths of cloth, came home and, squatting down on my heels, proceeded to cut out and make us a frock apiece before dark. That night we celebrated by going to the Ritz for dinner.

It's just as well that we got in our celebration early. A few days later, our young man was offered a job in England with a fifty-thousand-dollar salary appended. He didn't have time to say good-by, but he did cable us his whereabouts and his good luck wishes.

Don't think Nella was floored. This time she went to our mutual friend, Harry Reichenbach, and persuaded him that there was a mint of unmined gold in Dressler. Harry, Nella, and I got together and worked out an idea for a series of travelogues in which I was to play the rôle of a modern Mrs. Malaprop abroad. Harry got his equipment and a company ready and we set sail for France. The first picture was to be made in Versailles and the second in Fontainebleau.

The notion back of those pictures was a good one and we had a lot of fun making them, but the pictures themselves were bad. Too little plot and too much custard pie. When I saw them run off, I refused to let them be released. I said I would rather

starve than label myself with poor work. Reluctantly Harry agreed with me and killed the pictures. He was disappointed, and he had lost money on the venture, but he was a good sport.

By this time, I was frankly discouraged. Not so Nella. She had imbued several of our friends with her notion that I was born to shine in the movies. Helena Dayton, the artist, and Louise Barrett, the writer, put their heads together and turned out a scenario designed to show the motion-picture organization what I could do. They bombarded a big picture company with calls about their script. Finally, they were told to talk it over with the competent young woman who had first say about these matters. When they told her that they had me in mind for the leading character, the young woman didn't even look at the script.

"Miss Dressler?" she asked pityingly. "Audiences wouldn't stand for her. All they want nowadays is young love."

"But we're hoping to get Lionel Barrymore or George Arliss to play opposite her," persisted my loyal friends.

The young woman's eyes brightened with horror.

"Those old fossils!" she said, and turned her assured back on the pair of imbeciles who had dared suggest such folly.

I couldn't bear to see my friends repeatedly humiliating themselves on my account. Hallie Phillips (Mrs. Robert Morris Phillips of New York) was begging me to go abroad with her. Lady Colbrook was again urging me to visit her in Italy. Well, I might as well have one more fling before I settled down in the Old Ladies' Home. I sold most of my remaining Liberty bonds and in company with Hallie Phillips sailed for Europe.

Hallie and I met under amusing circumstances. It was during the War, when we were both drafted to act as saleswomen in a second-hand clothes store which a group of society women were running for charity. The dresses and hats which composed our stock had been donated largely by Park Avenue. They were really beautiful things and were offered at a fraction of their value.

I had never met Mrs. Phillips before I encountered her in the shop. As she is on the surface a very dignified and self-restrained person and I am, to put it mildly, inclined to be impulsive, I thought it unlikely that we would click. Indeed, for the first hour or so, it looked as if we wouldn't. Each of us regarded the other with a certain wariness.

Things were pretty slow that morning. It must have been eleven o'clock before our first prospect

entered. She was a plump, rosy Irish girl — obviously a nursemaid or cook — who went at once to the rack that held evening gowns. In turning over the dresses, her glance and her hand lingered longest on a stunning frock, blue velvet trimmed in ermine. Seeing the girl's interest, Hallie stepped forward with her little sales talk.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" murmured Hallie. "And the blue would go so nicely with your coloring." And then, to clinch a sale which she thought already more than half-made, she added, "It was sent down to us by Mrs. Blankety-Blank," mentioning a smart young society matron whose name graces the Social Register and whose face is familiar to all who look at the rotogravure section of the newspapers. "She brought it home from Paris just a few weeks ago and she's worn it only once."

The customer took the gown off the rack and held it up to the light. Slowly shaking her head, she replaced the garment and addressed Mrs. Phillips. "Well," she said, "she sweats same as another, an' I wouldn't be wantin' her dress, not if she was the Queen o' England herself!"

The Irish girl turned on her heel and I grabbed the nearest object for support. It happened to be the dress rack, which promptly gave way, burying Hallie and myself beneath an avalanche of second-

hand clothes. We sat there completely enshrouded, and like two idiots howled until it's a wonder some passer-by, hearing the weird sounds we made, didn't have us investigated and hauled off to Bellevue. In due time we emerged good friends, and good friends we have remained ever since. We have made innumerable trips together, and we swap visits as often as the exigencies of our two busy lives permit.

Hallie is one of the best traveling companions in the world. Like me, she disdains schedules. I'm always sorry for travelers who are so bound to their self-appointed itineraries that they miss everything except the train.

Probably half of my life has been spent "on the road", either for profit or pleasure. One of the biggest joys travel has brought me is the large number of hotel men it has made my friends. Among the pleasant American institutions which seem to be passing, I can think of none more to be regretted than the old-fashioned type of hotel landlord who helped to make trouping a happy experience for me and a thousand and one others whose business kept them moving from place to place.

John Chamberlain of Washington — he also built the Chamberlain at Old Point Comfort — was the greatest connoisseur of food we have ever had in

America, not even excepting George Rector or Delmonico. For years, whenever I found myself within motoring distance of his hotel, I always went there. It was his delight to fix up after-theater supper parties for me. At one of these gay gatherings, he confided to me that he hoped to die like a good soldier with his boots on. He did, too, for when he found the end was near, he made his nurse prop him up in bed and dress him from head to toe!

The Planters in St. Louis is another old-time hostelry that comes to mind. There, too, the genial manager used to welcome me after the show with supper and flowers. George Hall and his son, young George, of the famous Adams House in Boston — it used to be said that every Bostonian of consequence passed through the Adams House at least once each day — were among those who put themselves out to make me feel at home. Others were old Mr. Zimmerman of the St. Nicholas in Cincinnati, Tilly Haynes of the Broadway, Frank Wiggins of the Vanderbilt, Stafford and Whitaker of the Imperial and the Netherlands respectively, Albert Keller of the Ritz, all of New York, and my good friend Roy Carruthers, who managed successively the Old Cliff House and the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, the Pennsylvania and the Old Waldorf in New York. Henri Rost of the Savoy-Plaza com-

bines the efficiency of the ultra-modern hotel manager with the suavity and friendliness of the old régime.

Of course, one cannot think of the Waldorf without thinking of Oscar, the immortal. In the days when Lillian Russell was the toast of the town, a man-about-town would have hung his head in shame if he couldn't count on Oscar to greet him by name when he entered the dining room of the Old Waldorf with his beauty on his arm. Thank heaven Oscar survived to carry the suave traditions of the Old Waldorf into the new. What a pity he couldn't carry the old carpets with him, too. Will I ever forget the cabbage roses that used to bloom underfoot in Peacock Alley! I miss them — the worsted blossoms of yesteryear. Let anybody who can satisfy his soul with broadloom, but as for me, I shall go down to my grave maintaining that there is nothing like a good old-fashioned flowered hotel carpet to cheer the wanderer far from his own fireside. Thick and lush and colorful, it provided a proper background for the enjoyment of such gustatory triumphs as Crêpes Suzette and Sole Marguéry.

Along with the passing of the old-time hotel manager, I deplore also the disappearance of the independent theatrical manager of my salad days.

At the time when I was establishing myself on Broadway, the managers of touring companies offered limitless opportunities to ambitious young actors. Instead of the handful of road companies which to-day play in perhaps a hundred theaters throughout the country, twenty-five years ago we had several hundred itinerant managers who presented in the five or six hundred theaters then available in our small cities and larger towns excellent productions played by capable casts. Of course a company failed, or was stranded occasionally, but this was one of the fortunes of war and nobody thought of getting tragic about it. Certainly not the players and their manager. With any luck at all, good shows lasted all fall and winter, and fair ones managed to keep going through the Christmas holidays.

In short, in those days, the manager of a good touring company was a power to reckon with. Managers of local theaters often made acceptable productions, too. I remember that B. C. Whitney of Detroit usually had a couple of companies on the road as well as several offerings in his own theaters. Then there was Eugene Tompkins, famous as the director of Lotta Crabtree's Park Theater in Boston. Mr. Tompkins staged a number of spectacular productions, including, I think, "Burma" and

"The Sudan." And the Shubert boys had a lot of fun and gained much valuable experience running the Bastable Theater in Syracuse before they decided to storm New York and, eventually, Broadway.

These old-time managers used to spend every free minute during a busy winter season reading, reading, in the hope of stumbling on a find to put in rehearsal for the following season. Every man jack of them was on his toes every day of the year. Telegraph offices in every considerable town in the country counted on him for a large part of their patronage. Most of his business was transacted by wire. He wired ahead to make arrangements in the next town; he wired to New York for actors and costumes and scenery, when there were casualties in his own organization. He wired his countless newspaper friends throughout the land, thereby gaining a lot of pleasant and inexpensive publicity.

Those were the days when a good press agent boasted an imagination second only to that of Jules Verne! Do you remember what a time there was in New York City when Mrs. Pat Campbell's agent swore to every newspaper editor in town that Mrs. Campbell positively would not play unless something was done to deaden the noises of Times

Square? Then you remember, also, that the busiest street in the world was covered ankle-deep in tan-bark to soothe the great Campbell's nerves!

Imagine a press agent to-day getting away with a trick like that!

But, alas, the old-time press agent and the old-time manager alike began to make an exit when a few smart men in the theatrical game discovered that it was possible to make money without owning theaters or going to the trouble of making productions. For when the chain theater came in, the independent producing manager and the powerful local manager both went out. The chain organizations may make for more efficiency, and, possibly, for a better average in entertainment, but they lack the color and the glamour that the old-time touring companies carried in their wake.

But I started out to talk about my trip to Europe with Hallie Phillips. I had long cherished a desire to wander through Austria and Germany, where my father grew to young manhood. Hallie agreed to go with me.

After prowling through most of central Europe, we separated, she to go to friends in England, I to go to France and thence to Italy. Until I discovered the climate of Southern California, I had determined to spend my declining years in Italy. God

must have been in a genial mood when he gave Italy her climate. Surely it is the most golden, the most beneficent of all climates. Somebody once asked me which was my favorite Italian city. I replied, "Naples, because it sets me down in the open doorway of Italy."

I landed in Rome just in time to see Mussolini make his triumphal entry on October 30, 1922. He could have had crown and scepter on a silver platter. But he laid both at his King's feet. "We are here to save Italy, Sire," he said.

I'm not for dictators generally, but I firmly am for Mussolini.

Italy is coming back faster than any other European country. I believe that Mussolini is responsible for this comeback. And while I am a rugged individualist, I have a great respect for the Fascisti movement.

Perhaps my feeling is colored by an incident that occurred one evening when Ethel Levey and I were leaving a Venetian palazzo where we had been entertained. The evening was fresh and starlit, so we decided to walk. As we started over San Marco, we noticed two dapper young men in the uniform of the Fascisti who seemed to be following us. With some alarm we remembered our evening clothes and the glittering paste jewelry we wore. It had

fooled our hosts; it might well fool a couple of petty thieves.

As we reached a dark, narrow turning, we saw that one of the youths had dropped behind, apparently to act as lookout, while the other was advancing rapidly toward us. By the time he reached us, we were too frightened to scream. Imagine our feeling when he said in perfect English, "Permit me, Signoras, to accompany you to your hotel. You must not go about with all this jewelry and no protection. There are still rascals left in Italy. It is the pleasure of the Fascisti to protect you from such."

It was on this trip to Italy that I had an amusing and rather dangerous adventure with our then Ambassador, Richard Washburn Child. Mr. and Mrs. Child had long been friends of mine and they could not give themselves too much trouble on my account.

One afternoon, Mr. Child took me to visit the baths of Caracalla. As we strolled about this lovely spot, I saw a pair of gates which were locked. Immediately I wanted to see what was on the other side and said as much to an attendant. He shook his head, "It is impossible, Signora."

My disappointment was obvious. Mr. Child explained to the attendant that he was the Ameri-

can Ambassador and requested as a special favor to him and his country that he be allowed to give his guest the pleasure she so ardently desired. Instantly the gates were flung wide. We were told with extravagant flourishes that the attendant was ours to command; that Italy itself was ours to command.

Feeling properly triumphant, we swept inside. The gardens were overgrown with a lush beauty. Ribbons of moss depended from broken columns. Birds rose in startled flight at our approach. The grass sprang tall and green along the zigzagging path that beckoned us on and on. We were both thrilled with our adventure into a forbidden land, and on our way out paused to thank the attendant for his courtesy.

"But I don't understand," objected Mr. Child as the man's hand closed over a couple of shining lire, "why the public is barred from such a romantic garden."

The man lifted a shoulder in a barely perceptible shrug. He bowed low. "I cannot imagine, Excellency," he murmured, "unless it is because we expect the whole thing to cave in at any moment!"

Mr. Child looked at me, and I looked at him. Doubtless we had the same vision. We had left Mrs. Child at home to nurse a headache. I could

picture her reading through her tears the headlines in tomorrow's papers: "Out of the ruins were dragged the bodies of the American Ambassador and Marie Dressler, the musical comedy Queen!"

It was to Richard Washburn Child that I owed my command to an audience with Pius XI. Naturally, I was proud and happy to have the privilege of being presented to His Holiness, the Pope. The evening before the presentation, one of the Embassy secretaries called up to ask if I had black gloves and a black veil to wear. I had a newish pair of black gloves, but no veil of any description. However, I did possess a handsome black lace evening gown which I promptly cut up to make a veil. I was quite pleased with myself until a few days later, when Mrs. Child invited me to dine at the Embassy with a group of Italian notables. Then I discovered that I had destroyed my last decent evening frock. Considerably dashed, I rushed out and bought some filmy black material and sat up half the night combining it with such scraps of lace as I could salvage from my workbag. The result was nothing to make Vionnet envious, but it passed muster when draped with the veil I had worn in my audience with the Pope. There's nothing like a scarf to cover a multitude of loose stitches.

I was deeply impressed by the beautiful cere-

mony at the Vatican and more particularly by the dignity and charm of His Holiness, Pius XI, but I was winded by the long stairs I had to climb before I reached the audience chamber. I was still panting when I returned from the brief presentation to find a young man from one of the papers waiting in an anteroom, pencil in hand, to record my impressions of my first visit to the Vatican.

"Now, Miss Dressler," he began, with the brisk competence which seemed to afflict all young reporters, "what in that noble old pile impressed you most?"

"The absence of an elevator," I gasped. "I do wish they'd get a lift for fat old women like me."

Of course I did not expect the young man to take me literally. Imagine my chagrin, therefore, when I picked up the morning paper to discover on the front page in bold black type: "American Actress Annoyed Because She Had to Climb Vatican Stairs!" After this experience, I was always careful to label my attempts at humor as such.

During this trip to Italy, it was borne in on me that one never really knows one's countrymen until one encounters them abroad. Americans who are as natural and democratic as boiled cabbage at home suddenly wax fearful and snobbish when they find themselves on foreign soil.

I recall a certain Congressman whom I had met in Washington while I was playing there. This gentleman had crossed on the boat with Hallie and myself and had proved not averse to being seen in the company of an actress who sat at the captain's table and a woman whose name was actually printed in the Social Register. But when he stumbled on me waiting in the anteroom of our Ambassador to Rome, he developed a convenient astigmatism. In the language of the dear, dead nineties, he cut me dead. No doubt he reasoned that Ambassadors were sticklers in the matter of social distinctions. Quite conceivably, Mr. Child might not approve of gentlemen found talking to musical-comedy actresses.

I was so embarrassed by his embarrassment that I did my best not to look at him when I saw that he meant not to see me. We were studiously avoiding each other's eyes when the door to the Ambassador's inner office burst open and out dashed Mr. Child. Grasping me by both hands, he exclaimed, "Good Lord, Marie, I'm glad to see you. Mrs. Child has been turning Rome upside down trying to get you and Lady Colbrook for luncheon."

I was sorry for my poor Congressman now. He was fairly apoplectic, in his eagerness to make amends. As for me, I pretended that I suffered from

astigmatism too. I swore I hadn't seen my old friend until the moment he chose to see me. That afternoon I found in my room a large box of exquisite roses bearing his card. I sent the flowers to a near-by hospital.

Then there was the case of the American-born Princess who had, by dint of her dollars and a great deal of really fine charitable work, almost established herself in the exclusive society of a certain haughty old Italian city. To cap her career, she planned to give a charity ball, the like of which had never been seen, in a well-known hotel. The high light of the evening's entertainment which she had devised for her guests was to be a dance by Gilda Gray, then at the apogee of her fame as an exponent of the shimmy.

Now the Princess' mother had once danced in the chorus of a show in which I was one of the principals. We had been good friends, even after she married a very nice man with a very nice lot of money. The Princess preferred not to remember that her mother had ever been a show girl; in fact, she did not enjoy being reminded that she herself was born and grew up against a common denominator sort of American background. She had snubbed me when she encountered me in London a year or so earlier, and I did not like to lay myself

open to further snubbing. Therefore, when she sent me a note inviting me to take part in the program she was arranging, I refused. Immediately she let it be known that I had refused to use my talents for charity.

Shortly after this exchange of notes, the Princess and I found ourselves at the same garden party. She upbraided me in the presence of our hostess for refusing to help the poor.

"I am happy to help the poor of whom I am so often one," I told her, "but I do not see why I should trouble myself to further your plans for your own social advancement. I am not interested in your ambitions, Princess."

I should have been ashamed of myself, for I had let my temper get the better of my manners. But my barbed dart had gone home. The Princess reddened. "At least," she murmured, "you will take a table, even if you will not perform?"

Gladly I agreed to do that much.

Well, the evening of the ball came. Half the aristocracy of Italy, not to mention a goodly sprinkling of visiting titles from the Riviera, was crowded into the ballroom of the hotel where the Princess was giving her party. There was at least one member of royalty present. The Princess was triumphant. This affair would mark the end of

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her struggle to entrench herself in the inner circle.

The first half of the evening went off well. There was a notable increase in the tension as the hour approached for the much-heralded American dancer's number. A spotlight hovered over the polished segment of floor in front of the orchestra. Gilda Gray did her dance marvelously, but for some reason — probably because it was foreign to their conception of dancing — the audience did not warm to it. Indeed, a number of persons rose from their tables and prepared to take their leave.

I saw the Princess' face fall. If the guests did not remain to order supper, there would be no popping of wine corks and no "proceeds for charity." The papers would record her party as a failure. She would lose ground she had fought hard to win. She was very young. At that moment, she looked like a child about to lose its stick of candy. It was hard for her not to show her disappointment and chagrin. I remembered her mother, a good little trouper if there ever was one. We had been stranded together once in Kansas City. I looked again at the Princess. After all, she was a fellow American. I could not see her let down.

Gathering my skirts about me — I was wearing the reconstructed black lace, part of which had

figured in my audience with the Pope — I crossed the room to the orchestra. They had started on the Blue Danube Waltz, apparently on the theory that it would take the bad taste out of their mouths. I held up my hand and they stopped the music. "Play that shimmy thing again, boys," I said, "and put twice as much wiggle in it. Remember there's two times as much of me as there is of Miss Gray."

The orchestra did its part and I tried to do mine. Maybe between us we succeeded. At any rate, those who were about to depart sat down again. Most of them were still there when the pink Italian dawn stole up to the windows. The Princess' party was a success. And I was terribly proud to have had a hand in it. Which probably goes to prove that there's a little of the snob in Marie Dressler too.

Next to Naples, the doorway to Italy, I love Rome best of all Italian cities because it is the home of the Coliseum. Of all the beauty spots of the world, give me the Coliseum by moonlight. It is rich in that peculiar beauty which one feels rather than sees. On any fine night, its shadowy niches are peopled by young lovers. My courting days were behind me before I first saw the Coliseum, but I can testify that to share it with kindred spirits is one of the rarer experiences of mankind. One moon-drenched evening as I stood there gazing up at the

towering ruins from some high recess of which a flutist was pouring out his soul, I knew that near me was another who felt as I did. Turning, I found at my elbow Adolph Ochs and his wife. We waited without speaking until the hidden musician had finished, and then we walked silently away together. We had met and liked each other before, but from that moment our friendship held a warmth and a sureness which it had lacked. Each had taken the measure of the other's soul.

Chapter

· XII ·

I LOVED Italy, but I could not stay there forever as a pensioner on the hospitality of my friends. When I got home I found America as youth-mad, as flapper-crazy as ever. At least, that's what the men who had the say-so about the stage and screen told me.

Well, if they wouldn't let me act on the stage, I'd act off. I proceeded to give an excellent imitation of a busy woman. For three years I spent three hours a day singing, playing, and swapping yarns with the disabled veterans in the hospitals. I got up benefit dances. I acted as hostess at the Ritz Supper Club. Incidentally, as my funds sank lower and lower, I moved to the Ritz. My friends were beginning to be a little too insistent in their invitations to visit them. I couldn't bear pity. "Front" was necessary to my bruised pride. I figured no-

body would be sorry for me if I lived at the Ritz. Besides, my old friend, Albert Keller, was manager there, and he saw to it that I got the smallest room in the house at a ridiculously low price. It was Keller, too, who found me the job of supper club hostess.

One amusing incident occurred to lighten the tedium of those long, dreary months of waiting for "something to turn up." The Newspaper Women's Club of New York gave its annual ball at the Ritz while I lived there. I was among those present. Toward the shank of the evening, I got a note from Will Rogers, begging me to come over to his table. When I presented myself, my back crawling with terror, because I thought I was going to be called on to put on a stunt of some sort, I saw at once that Will was in what he would describe as a "stew." His brow was corrugated with frowns and the famous chewing gum was working over time.

"Look here, Muree," said Will, "I'm in a peck of trouble and you got to help me out."

"Anything I can do, Will," I assured him, meanwhile doing a little private stewing of my own, as I tried to think of something bright enough to sing or say before such a crowd. "Anything I can do — you know that."

"Well," stammered Will, mopping his face, "it

ain't much, Muree. Nothin' I wouldn't do for you, if you was caught in a pinch like me."

"Out with it," I commanded, by this time prepared to walk on my hands around the Crystal Room, if by so doing I could abate Will's distress.

"It's like this," poor Will went on, nervously displaying a small gold laurel wreath that lay on the table in front of him. "I'm chairman of the committee to award this durn thing to the most beautiful woman in the room. There's so many good-looking dames here I'm scared to pick one for fear the others'll jump on me and tear my hair out by the roots. So I thought — that is, I *kinder* thought, Muree, if you'd stand there and let me put this durn thing on your head, the crowd would kinder laugh it off and nobody'd get mad!"

So — I helped Will out and nobody got mad, not even Muree. Thus I, who at the tender age of five learned that I was an ugly duckling, found myself at fifty crowned Queen of Beauty. Truly the ways of Providence are inscrutable.

Beautiful or not, my face is my own, and if the long years of close association with it have not made me exactly fond of it, at least they have given me a friendly feeling toward it. It is some comfort to know that mine is a face which once seen is rarely forgotten. Even animals seem to ex-

perience no difficulty in fixing my features in their memories. There is the classic example of Lockhart's elephants.

Twenty-odd years ago, while I was on tour in vaudeville, I made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Lockhart, an amiable couple whose elephant act was the pride of their lives. I also made the acquaintance of the elephants. From the first, we took to each other, the elephants and I. Indeed, the animals became so fond of me that Lockhart declared I was a nuisance, for the big rascals wouldn't half work when I stood in the wings to watch their act. Now and then I went on in Lockhart's place. We made such a successful team the elephants and Dressler, that Lockhart offered me almost twice as much as I was making to join the act. The money was a great temptation, but the elephants were young and I felt that eventually they would overshadow Dressler, so I sacrificed the present to the future — which is something an artist must learn to do early in the game.

Four years after this initial encounter, the Lockharts and I found ourselves playing simultaneously in a certain New England city. As soon as Mrs. Lockhart discovered I was in town, she came over to my hotel to invite me to visit her pets. I was delighted at the opportunity to see my old friends

again. At the entrance to the enclosure where the elephants were kept, Mrs. Lockhart whispered, "Don't say anything. Just stand here and see if they will recognize you."

We stood there for a few seconds without any of the animals paying us any particular attention. But all at once old Susie, the matriarch of the lot, began to act queerly. Shivers of excitement ridged her thick hide; she swayed from side to side. Then she lifted her trunk heavenward and began to trumpet. Another moment, and the whole herd — there were five of them at this time — came rushing toward me. For a fraction of a minute I was frightened, but my pride and my vanity came to my rescue. I was tickled to death that those elephants remembered me.

But this isn't the end of the story.

Seven years later, I found myself playing in Chicago. I saw in the papers that Ringling's circus was at the Coliseum. One afternoon when there was no matinée, I trotted over to the Coliseum, headed, of course, for the menagerie. While I was engaged in gazing raptly at the educated seals, a mighty trumpeting went up among the elephants quartered not far away. Attracted by the noise I wandered over in their direction, and such an outburst of elephant welcome you never heard!

I thought I recognized old Susie and spoke to the keeper who told me that Ringling had bought the elephants from Mrs. Lockhart shortly after Lockhart's death, a couple of years before. I had forgotten that Lockhart was dead, but old Susie and her family had not forgotten me, and they had seen me only once in eleven years. Sometimes I think Dan Daly didn't mean to insult me after all when he called me "that elephant of a Dressler!"

It was during those empty years at the Ritz that I made the first big mistake of my life. I allowed myself to be urged into something I knew nothing about. Somebody suggested that I try real estate. The Florida boom was then at its height. I accepted as gospel what I was told about the value of the land down there. I had sold a good deal of it before I realized that not only was I a sucker, but that I was making suckers of those who bought through me. Almost beside myself with distress, I did what I could to straighten things out.

This experience was one of the most humiliating of my life, but it taught me a valuable lesson: Hindsight, no matter how clear, cannot take the place of foresight. It was lack of foresight that had made it possible for me to be drawn into a game of which I did not know the first rule. No more of that for Marie! If I couldn't get a job on the stage, there

was one other thing I knew how to do as well as I knew how to act — cook. But that part of the story comes a little later.

About this time, Anne Morgan and a group of her friends conceived the idea of founding the American Woman's Association. They made a survey and discovered that there were in New York City thousands upon thousands of women in business and professions who had no common meeting place. Moreover, many of these women had no congenial place to live.

A crying need was a clubhouse for them, a place where they could meet for lectures, concerts, a quiet game of bridge, study clubs, dances, and yes — dates! Such a clubhouse would also provide living quarters with a background of comfort and culture for those of good taste but modest purse.

They needed, Miss Morgan and her associates found, two million dollars to build the clubhouse. I felt honored when they asked me to help raise the money. I wrote plays and acted in them. I made speeches and devised radio programs. I bedeviled the general public and had a grand time working with such women as Anna Steese Richardson, Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, and Ida M. Tarbell. In short, Miss Morgan's project was the sort of thing into

which I could throw myself unreservedly. As it turned out, I threw myself into it a little too *unreservedly.*

Just as things were shaping up for the final drive for that two million dollars, I had to make a flying trip to Paris. While I was gone, Miss Morgan had the brilliant idea of interesting the Rockefellers in the proposed clubhouse. But these conservative gentlemen proved a little "leery" of the notion. Wasn't it possible that such an institution would smack somewhat of the unconventional? Still, the Rockefellers did evince a faint interest.

As a trump card, Miss Morgan planned a luncheon to which she asked Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Junior, and such members of her committee as she felt could be trusted to impress the guest of honor with their ultra-conservative and conventional point of view.

I got back to America on the morning scheduled for the luncheon. I called Anne as soon as I got off the boat. She mentioned the luncheon. Without giving her a chance to go into detail, or to invite me to join the party, I chirped cheerily, "I'll be right over," and dashed home to change.

Everybody was at the table when I arrived. And everybody was on his best behavior. Never in all my life have I been present at a duller party. I was

bored to death, and I didn't see why Mr. Rockefeller wasn't, too.

"Humph," said I to myself, "you can't get money out of people *this* way."

When the time for speech-making came, I appointed myself a committee of one to stir things up. I proceeded to give a highly dramatized account of my latest adventures in Paris. I said I hadn't slept ten hours in ten nights and that I had gained ten pounds on this program. Then I was moved to relate what a French taxi-driver said to me.

This, I explained, had occurred during my first visit to Paris, when my French was even more sketchy than it is now. I wanted to locate the house of a friend. The taxi-man did his best to tell me that my friend lived just *behind* the Hotel Continental where I was stopping. "*C'est derrière l'Hotel Continental,*" he kept repeating.

I got it all but the *derrière.* I demanded, "*Que signifie derrière?*"

The wearied cabby watched me back out of his decrepit vehicle. He lifted a shoulder and spread his hands. "If," he said, "Madame does not know the meaning of *derrière,* nobody does!"

Anna Steese Richardson laughed so hard that somebody had to slap her on the back to keep her

from choking. Mr. Rockefeller chuckled heartily, but later, when he was approached with an invitation to buy clubhouse bonds, he politely declined. No doubt he concluded that if Marie Dressler was to have anything to do with setting the tone of the institution, it would be no place for the Rockefeller dollars.

Of course Anne Morgan and the others insisted that Mr. Rockefeller had made up his mind not to contribute before he came to the luncheon, but I couldn't get over the fear that I had spilled the beans. I rolled up my sleeves and pitched in, and I wound up by selling enough bonds to make up for what the Rockefellers didn't buy. But it took me a long time to get over the chagrin I suffered when I learned that the stage had been set for a performance quite different from the little act I had put on.

Meanwhile, seven years had gone by with practically no engagement of a professional nature.

Chapter

· XIII ·

IN spite of my frenzied efforts to busy myself with anything that offered, my courage, like my bank account, had run low. I was frightened and terribly restless. All these things I had been doing filled my time, but not my life. Acting was my life, — the theater, the stage. Sometimes I felt I couldn't go on without the theater. . . .

Then, one Friday morning, I chanced to go — no, I was *led* — down to the old Waldorf to hear Doctor John Murray talk about faith. Doctor Murray had faith. I could see it in his tranquil eyes, feel it in his untroubled spirit. Sitting there, listening to the simple, candid words of that great teacher, it came upon me with a shock that I had lost faith in myself, in others; maybe in God. And I knew that without faith I was indeed lost.

Doctor Murray's philosophy could be grasped by

a child. He taught and lived that God is Love, that life is love, that *fear* is *death.*

How I wish I could pass that on to young folks who are just beginning life! It was Mark Twain, wasn't it, who said, "I have had many troubles, most of which never happened." A lot of us could say the same thing with just as much truth. We spend the best part of our days anticipating trouble. It's more fun to look forward to joy and it's a great deal better for the digestion and blood pressure. For years I made myself miserable worrying about things when I might as well have been celebrating the impending arrival of good fortune. Now I proceed on the sensible assumption that if lightning is going to strike me, it will strike anyway. Meanwhile, I shall make a point of cramming as much happiness as possible into the good hours that are mine.

Worry and hurry are twin scourges that kill off more people than all other diseases combined. I'm for fewer and smaller worries. There is only one thing in this world to fear and that is — fear. It is the most corroding, the most damning, the most craven of all human emotions. Living has always been a delight to me. Even when things were at their worst, I took a lusty joy in fighting back. I hate to leave this gorgeous crazy world that has

given me so much fun. Until I learned from Doctor Murray not to fear, I hated the idea of death. Now I am not afraid. Once, a few years ago, I came close to death's door. So close that I could hear the dark wings of death beating above my head. And suddenly, to my great joy, I discovered that I no longer hated and feared death. It was as unterrifying, as natural, as life itself. *It was right.* I knew that my time hadn't come then, but I knew that when it did come, it would be as simple as taking the hand of a friend and passing from one room into another.

But I did not feel this way that first morning I went to hear Doctor Murray. It was from him I learned to open my heart to love. And where love is, fear cannot dwell. I walked out of Doctor Murray's lecture room a free woman.

From that day until Doctor Murray's death, several years later, I never missed one of his talks. And from that day to this, I hope I have grown in faith. I know I have grown in richness of spirit and in happiness. Life took on a new and a larger meaning. I was no longer the center of my little private universe.

By this time, I was living from hand to mouth. I didn't enjoy it, but I was not afraid. A week's engagement here; an evening's work there. I had

MISS DRESSLER AND ROBERT YOUNG IN "TUGBOAT ANNIE"

IN THE ENGINE ROOM, "TUGBOAT ANNIE"

a few securities left. If I sold the last of these, I should have enough to get to Paris and establish myself there in a modest way.

I had long dreamed of opening a hotel in Paris in my old age. A hotel for Americans who can never get water hot enough for the scalding baths they love. A hotel for Americans who would pass up duck at the *Tour d'Argent* for Maryland fried chicken and waffles. Above all, a place where coffee is coffee and not ground chicory! Yes, that would be the thing. A hostelry for my fellow countrymen who want their Paris served up with all the comforts of home. I sold my bonds.

Then one morning I slipped out and bought my passage. This was early in January, 1927.

At this time I was sharing my apartment with Nella Webb. I've told you before that Nella is a small, dark, animated person with the grace of a humming bird and the persistence of a bull pup. All her life Nella had been fascinated by astrology. Now she had definitely forsaken the stage and was giving her whole time to research and computations that made my head ache.

In spite of the bleak years through which I had passed since the War, Nella stubbornly insisted that I had a great future ahead of me. A future when it looked as if I didn't have even a present!

She brushed aside my good-natured scoffing. For months she had been poring over her musty tomes; making complicated astrological charts; chasing the stars all over the heavens. Daily she assured me that my big hour was about to strike. Only that morning she had told me excitedly that I hadn't much longer to wait.

But I had taken fate into my own hands.

There was a scene when I got home and broke the news to Nella. I showed her my ticket. "I'm going to Paris, Nella. I know how to cook. I know how to make people comfortable and happy."

Nella was horrified.

"Marie," she pleaded, "you're coming into a new cycle, one of the best periods of your life. The biggest success of all is ahead of you. All your life you've been a clown. Now you're going to be an actress!"

I was fifty-five years old. If I couldn't stage a comeback nine years ago, what could I do now? I laughed at Nella.

Then Nella got mad. And when she is mad, she is a formidable little bull pup, no humming bird at all. She called up my old friend, Jimmy Forbes, the playwright. "Jimmy," she wailed, "come over here. Marie is about to make a fool of herself."

Jimmy came on the run. He brought along Helena Dayton and Louise Barrett. They sat around in a solemn ring and listened while Nella read off my chart with all those impossible predictions of future grandeur. I don't think any of them except Nella had any particular faith in astrology, but they felt sort of responsible for me. They didn't want me to run off half-cocked, as they put it, to Paris.

"She'll lend her last sou to some tramp who wants to come home," snorted Jimmy.

"Hotel keeper, my eye!" groaned the girls. And one of them added, "She'll never collect a bill!"

They outdid each other in poking fun at me, in pleading with me. Jimmy, with a dozen brilliant Broadway hits to his credit, had never given up the idea that he would soon write something that would put me back in the big time. I have already told you how Helena and Louise and Nella had struggled to get me a chance in pictures. They believed in me when I no longer believed in myself.

But don't think I didn't care that I was a failure. I did, intensely. I still felt the current of life moving strongly within me. I didn't feel finished. But then I thought ruefully, "Perhaps that's one of the tragedies of age. Everybody knows but you, and your best friend won't tell you!"

However, I agreed to wait until the end of January.

"And not a day longer," I told Nella. "You'd better get your stars on the job!"

"You won't have to wait that long," said Nella. "You'll get one of the most important offers of your life on January 17."

And on the afternoon of January 17, something happened. I got a telephone call from Allan Dwan, one of Hollywood's topnotch directors. He wanted me to play a small part in an Olive Borden picture he planned to screen in Florida. I was not at all keen about it.

"Most important offer of my life!" I scoffed. "Why, it's just a bit. I'll be lost in the shuffle. The trip will delay me in getting started to Paris and the salary will hardly cover the expense of new clothes."

"You're going," said Nella grimly, "if I have to ship you by freight."

I gave in, but with poor grace.

In Florida, it was just as I expected. A little mite of a part. I arrived on Tuesday morning. By Wednesday night, my scenes had been shot. I got on the train and came back home to jibe at Nella, "I told you so!"

But the truth was, I had got a thrill out of that

little rôle. It had been a long time since I had faced a camera. I liked the feel of it. I always had. It made me homesick for the old days of "Tillie's Punctured Romance", when Charlie Chaplin and Mabel Normand and I had had so much fun fourteen years before.

Nella was triumphant. "It's just the beginning," she crowed.

"Humph!" said I.

But she wouldn't let me buy another ticket to Paris. For two months we sat in the apartment and twiddled our thumbs. Nella refused to step out of reach of the telephone. She went into huddles with her logarithms and Jupiter who, she said, was cutting up didos in my favor.

Then, when I had given up all hope, we got another telephone call, — a long-distance one from Hollywood, in the middle of the night. The voice at the other end of the wire was a feminine one that I had known for years, — the voice of Frances Marion, the boss scenario writer of the picture world. It sang across three thousand miles of wire.

"Pack up your pie box," it said, "and come to Hollywood. I need you!"

Nella danced a jig in her nightdress. She was triumphant.

"Your troubles are over," said Jimmy and Helena and Louise the next day.

But my troubles weren't over. They were just beginning. On a magnificent, a truly Olympian scale!

Chapter
· XIV ·

WE didn't try to go back to sleep that night. While Mamie packed, I put the coffeepot on. Nella and I drank cup after cup of black coffee; we talked and talked. The next morning, I was so excited, I couldn't eat any breakfast. My teeth actually chattered when I went down to the station to pick up the tickets to Hollywood. "A chance in pictures, after seven years of doing nothing! It can't be true! It can't be true!" I told myself over and over, as the giant wheels of the Chief clacked off the miles westward. All across the continent, we sat in our compartment, Nella and I, and played two-handed bridge. Next to music and my friends, cards have always been my greatest source of relaxation. When I am at peace with the world, I like a good stiff game of bridge, but when I am fighting things out with myself, I prefer solitaire.

We found Frances Marion waiting for us in Los Angeles. As rapidly as possible, she described the events that had led her to telephone me. And what do you think was the motivating force back of that midnight call? Nella Webb swears it was the stars conspiring together in their courses that had yanked me, a tired, discouraged old woman out of her bed in the middle of the night and set her face toward Hollywood and a new world. I tell you it was friendship such as has blessed few mortals. That, and the long arm of coincidence.

Coincidence is a funny thing. On the stage, between the pages of a book, it has no place. Editors hoot at it; producers scream at the mere mention of the word. But in real life, you and I could name a dozen instances in which human destiny has hung on coincidence pure and simple. And now let me show you how it turned my world topsy-turvy overnight.

In the years that had intervened since I last saw her, Frances Marion had become the best-known scenario writer in the country . . . one who could be counted on for sure-fire stuff. It was she who had provided Mary Pickford with many of the vehicles in which "America's Sweetheart" had ridden to fame and riches. Indeed, her employers at the Metro Studios had just about concluded that

it was impossible for Miss Marion to turn out a poor picture.

Two days before she telephoned me, Frances sat in her Hollywood office. A pile of movie magazines lay on the desk in front of her. Idly she picked up one and flipped through its pages while she waited for a telephone connection. Tucked away in an obscure corner, my name caught her eye. It headed a paragraph in a brief review of the picture in which I had played a bit for Allan Dwan in Florida a few months before.

The reviewer — God bless him and his to this day! — said: "Marie Dressler showed more power, more sympathy and understanding than she showed even in her heyday on the stage. She was once our première clown. Now there are tears behind her comedy. She is a great actress . . ."

A few minutes later, Miss Marion's secretary laid a letter before her. It was from Elisabeth Marbury in New York. As you know, Elisabeth Marbury was for a generation the center of what was perhaps the most powerful artistic and intellectual group in America. Her drawing-room was our nearest approach to a salon. She could be a formidable enemy; an invaluable friend.

She was, I am proud to say, my friend.

Elisabeth, Anne Morgan, and I had lunched to-

gether a few days before the Marbury letter found its way to Frances Marion. With characteristic generosity, Miss Marbury had written our mutual friend, Frances Marion, saying that in her opinion I could make a comeback in pictures. She added that she feared I had reached the end of my rope financially.

"Marie," she concluded, "is talking about running off to Paris to open a hotel. Between us and the gatepost, I think she is hurt because nobody will give her a chance on the stage."

Marie Dressler at the end of her rope! Marie Dressler a boarding-house keeper in Paris! Frances' mind leaped backward across the years. Memories crowded upon her. She recalled our first meeting in San Francisco thirteen years earlier, when I was the star of a successful play and she a cub reporter. Frances was unduly grateful to me for trying to make that first interview easy for her. Several years later, when she decided that life wasn't moving fast enough for her in Hollywood, that she must try her luck in New York, I happened to be able to steer her into a publicity job. She had come East armed with a few dollars and a reference which attested that she was a good cook. I think the reference was written by her father.

"I sha'n't starve, anyway," she told me gayly.

"Maybe I can't write, but I know I can cook."

Later, Frances was desperately ill. She had worked herself to a shadow, and when she got word that her beloved sister had died suddenly and tragically in San Francisco, her slender margin of resistance crumpled. I had become devoted to Frances and insisted upon taking care of her. Every day I went to the hospital where she lay between life and death for so many weary weeks. When she crept back to life, I read to her, told her silly stories, sang to her. Yes, I even danced for her. As soon as she was able to be moved, I took her home with me. Here I cooked for her and babied her as long as she would let me. To me, she was still the daughter I should have had — and didn't.

Well, as she sat there at her Hollywood desk in April, 1927, all these things, and many more, came back to Frances. And as all sensitive and generous persons do, she greatly exaggerated what she was pleased to call her debt of gratitude to me.

She found it hard, she confessed to me not long ago, to accept what Elisabeth Marbury had written her. When she saw me last, I was still a successful actress who could choose her rôle and name her price. But years had passed. Meanwhile, Frances had returned to Hollywood, where she had immersed herself in work. One success after another

poured from her typewriter. Her days, her hours, her moments even, were crowded. Neither she nor I was good at writing letters. When Frances thought of me, it was as she had left me — a star.

And now, across a silence of years, the long arm of coincidence had stretched out to bring my name sharply to her attention, twice in ten short minutes, Coincidence went even further than that. On that same fateful morning, it happened that Frances Marion was finishing up the scenario of a picture to be called "The Callahans and the Murphys." Chance had recalled me to her at a crucial moment; friendship did the rest.

Instantly Frances saw me in the rôle of *Ma Callahan*. All day long, between telephone calls and jousts with directors, stenographers, and script girls, she mulled the thing over. And when she closed the door of her office behind her that afternoon, she flew home to sit up all night, fattening the part of *Ma Callahan* for me.

Next morning she went to her boss, Irving Thalberg. She said, "I want Marie Dressler to play the part of *Ma.*" She added quite truthfully, "I had her in mind when I wrote it!"

Now Mr. Thalberg is a young man. He knows the possibilities of every extra on the M-G-M lot, and most of those on rival lots. He knew all about

current Broadway hits and the actors who played in them. But, remember, I had been off the stage for nine years. Almost a decade! That is a long time anywhere. In the theatrical world, it is an eternity if you have dropped out of sight. Irving Thalberg recalled Marie Dressler but vaguely, and then he thought of her as Frances had; she was a high-priced headliner. He had faith in his henchwoman's judgment, but ——

"Those big Broadway stars want all the money in the world," he demurred. "She won't come out here for what we can give her to play that part."

"I can get her," promised Frances.

You know what followed: The midnight telephone call from Hollywood that set Nella Webb to dancing jigs in her nightdress. That set my faithful maid, Mamie Cox, to packing my shabby wardrobe. Yes, the long arm of coincidence had reached across a continent to give me another chance. But it was friendship that had really turned the trick. A thousand favorable coincidences are just so many coincidences without the lever of friendship behind them.

I can truthfully say, "I owe everything to my friends."

Nella Webb's faith in me and in her stars had kept me from bouncing off to Paris to open a

tourist hotel. If it hadn't been for Helena Dayton and Louise Barrett and Jimmy Forbes, who had tried so hard to pry open stage doors for me, I should have given up in despair. They wouldn't tell me then what the producers said. Now I know.

I know about the vaudeville manager who said that for old times' sake he would be glad to help me, but that it would take money to put me back on the stage, and that he couldn't conscientiously ask his friends to bet their money on a losing horse. I know about another who said if he could raise the money, he thought it would be kinder to give it to me outright.

"Marie's done for," he said, "but it would be cruel to rub it in by letting her try again."

And, finally, there was little Frances Marion, who looked back across the years and remembered.

If I have any gift in this world, it is for picking friends. Those I've made have stuck to me through thick and thin. Maybe because I've tried to be a friend.

Friendship is worth any hardship, any sacrifice. It is the one bloom that remains fresh and fragrant when the years have stripped our lives of frailer blossoms. Fame, money, health — these come and go. But real friendship persists. It belongs to the

eternal. It can make an immortal of the humblest human.

For a while after we landed in Hollywood — Nella and I — it looked as my troubles were over just as my friends had predicted. Rehearsals for "The Callahans and the Murphys" got under way at once. The director was kind. My fellow actors, considerate. And, of course, Frances Marion was a tower of strength.

It was great to be back on the job. Back behind the make-up again . . . back in the glare of the big lights. The strange medley of mechanical and human sounds — this was during the last gasp of the silent films, when noise was an inseparable accompaniment of picture-making — was to me like the smell of sawdust in the nostrils of an old circus horse. I loved it just as I had loved it thirteen years before, when Charlie Chaplin, Mabel Normand, and I had made "Tillie's Punctured Romance" for Mack Sennett.

There had been many mechanical improvements since that far-away day. Settings were now lavish; costumes carefully designed to further characterization. How crude by comparison seemed the devices we had used in the old days to suggest speed, change of scene, danger. Overacting was on the wane. Pantomime had reached a new level of per-

fection. Restraint had come to the movies. In fact, it was hard to believe that motion pictures could be better than those that were being filmed in 1927. Harder still to conceive that in less than a year the whole technique of picture-making was to be revolutionized by the advent of sound!

And Hollywood itself! What a different place from the sparsely populated suburb through whose streets Charlie, and Mabel, and I had romped little more than a decade ago. The Hollywood of 1927 was a thriving city. It was sophisticated, gay, beautiful. Its boulevards were crowded with busy, happy people who seemed always in a holiday mood. Even the girls who waited on you at table looked as if they had just won a toothpaste or bathing-beauty contest, as indeed many of them had. The hills back of Hollywood were dotted with gorgeous homes built with the huge fortunes which had mushroomed up with the picture industry. Everywhere I turned, there were new wonders at which to marvel.

As for the part of *Ma Callahan,* it was grand. I reveled in it. And why shouldn't I? Frances had written it to order just for me. If I didn't make good in this rôle, I was hopeless, a total loss.

At last came the night of the pre-view.

We sat huddled in the back of the theater, —

Nella Webb, Frances Marion, Jimmy Forbes and I. My hands were clammy, my heart fearful to suffocation as we waited for the picture to flash on the screen. I had waited nine years for this moment, — nine years of marking time; of humiliation; of beating my head against a stone wall of managerial indifference and prejudice. And now the hour had struck on which my future, my very life hung. No audience can be more ruthless than a Hollywood audience of professionals. If they liked *Ma Callahan,* I was made. If they didn't — well, there was always Paris and my hotel.

The theater went black and the picture came on. Frances had done a good job. The situations were terribly funny. That hard-boiled audience laughed so much that if there had been any sound effects, you couldn't have heard 'em. And such applause at the end! Thrilled and grateful, we tried to sneak out. We wanted to get home, to talk and talk. But they wouldn't let us. They dragged us forth. How kind they were! How generous! Many of them were too young ever to have heard of me, but they were warm in their praise. They outdid each other in rosy predictions for my future.

Frances whispered, "You've done it. You're made. Every producer in Hollywood will be camped on your trail to-morrow. You'll see!"

I was so happy that night I couldn't sleep.

I wish I could make you understand how wonderful it all was. Remember, I was fifty-six. I had never permitted myself to be *down,* but I knew what it was to be *out.* And here I was in the game again. A youngster's game. And I was off to a splendid start. I felt the old vitality rising in a strong tide. I could go on and on. I *would* go on and on!

But there was a joker in the deck. One that none of us had dreamed could be there. The picture was about the Irish, and the Irish didn't like it. No sooner was it shown in a few test theaters than an avalanche of protests came in. Loyal sons of Erin rose up in their might. They said we were poking fun at them. It did no good to explain that we weren't. The Irish didn't like it and we couldn't afford to alienate the Irish.

The film was withdrawn without a real showing. The precious strip of celluloid to which my hopes were pinned was scrapped. Only a handful of people had seen it. That was a blow.

"It's too bad," Frances Marion tried to comfort me. "We'll have better luck next time."

There wasn't any next time, — not for nearly two long years. But by this time, *my* Irish was up. I'm a quarter Irish, you know, and there's more

of me than there is of most people. I decided to stick it out. For better or for worse, I would cast my lot with pictures. I would stay in Hollywood.

Chapter

· XV ·

I TOOK a little house on a hillside. From my second-story veranda I could see acre upon acre of green California grass and bright-hued California flowers. I could watch whole regiments of royal palms march down white avenues. I lived on my little porch. I had breakfast there every morning. Afternoons and evenings I played solitaire. I played my piano and sang, occasionally to friends who dropped in, oftener to myself. Without my music I should have died long ago.

Before long, I could see that my friends were sorry for me. They couldn't keep pity out of their eyes. I have never liked pity, but I had to endure it, and to remember that most of it was rooted in affection. I have already told you that I had learned to cast fear out of my life. Now I taught myself to wait gracefully. When I say that I waited, don't

think that I just sat. Oh, no. I went to the studios. I made it clear that I would gladly undertake the smallest, feeblest rôle in the most insignificant picture. But there was nothing for me. The flapper fetish died hard. Producers still believed that the public wanted nothing but young love.

I believe there comes a time in life when there is nothing to do but wait. In youth, impatience is a virtue. After fifty, it is a vice. It took me nearly sixty years to learn this, so I don't expect anybody else to accept it on my say-so.

Again my funds sank very low. And again friendship came to my rescue. For years, two of my very good friends had been people of considerable means. When they heard how things were going with me, they did a rare and beautiful thing. They said, "If we knew we were going to die to-morrow, we should leave Marie a little legacy. Maybe she won't need it to-morrow, but she needs it now. We won't wait."

They sat down and wrote out a check. Enough to keep me a year. If it hadn't been for that check, for those friends, I might not have been able to hold on.

I had plenty of time to think both backward and forward. I dared not dwell too much in the present; at least, not too much in *my* present. But it was

fascinating to consider the present of those with whom I had shared the fun of making "Tillie's Punctured Romance" thirteen years before.

Mack Sennett, who had burst in upon me, incoherent with enthusiasm that fateful afternoon at the movies, to plead with me to join him in a shoestring production, was now rich and powerful with a studio of his own, a magnificent home at Santa Monica, a yacht, and goodness knows what else at his beck and call. Charlie Chaplin, who had made his first big splash with "Tillie" and me, was now the idol of the screen world. Dramatic critics who were inclined to snoot the movies were shouting at the top of their voices that Chaplin was a genius. Those in high places delighted to do him honor. It had become the fashion to proclaim oneself a Chaplin fan.

I thought then, and I think now, that Charlie is the prince of comedians and the world's supreme pantomimist. He is the only screen actor who has no need of words. Personally, I believe he was wise to stick to that universal language which knows no limitations of race or geography. A laugh or a sob is the same the world over. It is just as effective in Peking or Carcassonne as it is in Brooklyn or Podunk. It is wonderful to think that this boy who was born in the London slums, grew up in an or-

phans' home, and was schooled in the University of Hard Knocks, should have become our unofficial ambassador of good will to practically all the peoples of the earth!

Chaplin has been pretty generally misunderstood by those who should have understood him best. He is abnormally sensitive; only an abnormally sensitive person would possess that delicate perceptivity which is at once Chaplin's curse and the root of his genius. Charlie is proud too; as proud as sin. Sensitiveness and pride — a devilish combination which gives a man a long memory for slights and hurts! Charlie doesn't forgive easily, but he is the most generous and loyal of friends.

And where was Mabel Normand, "the Keystone girl", who thirteen years ago was the best-known of us all? It was hard to believe she was now broken in health and the victim of a nation-wide scandal. I wish I could make you see her as I remember her. Dark, little, vivaciously pretty, as active and as mischievous as a monkey, she was the first great comedienne of the screen. Always willing to risk life and limb to give her fans a thrill, she used to spend half her time laid up in the hospital for repairs.

I think Mabel was born in or near Atlanta, Georgia. I know that she grew up near Boston,

was educated in a Washington convent, and that she was an artists' model in New York when Mack Sennett discovered her and gave her a chance in the films. She was an established star when we started to make "Tillie." I remember she got as mad as a wet hen when Sennett gave me the star's dressing room on location. She demanded that he turn me out. I got mad too, and refused to budge. When she saw that I was fat and forty-ish, she sent Sennett a wire — he was probably a couple of blocks away at the time — which read: "Father, Dear Father, Come Home, All Is Forgiven."

Mabel kept the Keystone lot in gales of laughter. A natural wit and tease, she adored plaguing us all. Some of her *bons mots* are still current in Hollywood. Old-timers still chuckle over the deliciously idiotic jokes she played. I shall never forget the morning a brand-new but cocksure reporter called at the studio to interview her.

"Miss Normand," he briskly demanded, "what is your favorite recreation?"

Evidently he had rehearsed his part in the program and this was Question Number One on his list. Unfortunately neither he nor anybody else could anticipate Mabel's replies. She cocked her head to one side and looked pensive. Finally she favored the superior young man with the profile of

GRETA GARBO AND MISS DRESSLER MEET IN "ANNA CHRISTIE"

A TENSE MOMENT IN "ANNA CHRISTIE"

an innocent child; her voice was dripping with naïveté.

"Must I tell the really-truly truth?" she pleaded.

"Of course," he said masterfully. Obviously this soft creature was so much putty in the right hands.

"Well," said Mabel dreamily, "I love windy days when houses blow down on old people and squash 'em. I adore watching criminals crim, and I dote on mothers who neglect their children because it shows they have the good of the child at heart. But best of all," her voice had grown softer and softer, "best of all, I love to break babies' legs . . . nice little fat babies' legs with white stockings on 'em! And now," she finished brightly, "what do *you* do for fun?"

But the young man had fled.

I heard later that he had given up reporting for bouncing in a water-front saloon in San Francisco. No doubt he found it easier on the nervous system.

And now something quite funny happened — one of life's little ironies. I had given up knocking at stage doors to wait for an opening wedge in a movie studio. And after eighteen months of fruitless waiting, I got a call to return to the stage as the *Queen Mother* in "The Swan"! The salary was $125 a week. I, who for years had drawn $2500 a

week, accepted gratefully. That small part might open the door to opportunity again. That's just what it did. Almost at once, United Artists decided to make a movie version of "The Swan." I was asked to play my rôle on the screen. This, as it turned out, was destined to be my last silent picture.

For now fate dealt a hand in the movie game. Talking pictures sprang into being. Dialogue came to the screen. Movie moguls belatedly realized what the public had long been ready to accept, — namely, that there is more to living and loving than a handsome young man engaged in amorous acrobatics on the parlor sofa with a doll-faced young woman.

Dimly producers began to suspect that movie patrons were on to the fact that life does not end at twenty with a hero and heroine in a clinch. They saw they might as well admit that amusing and dramatic things can happen to men and women after they are thirty — or even forty. That people must carry on after wedding bells have ceased to ring. All at once we began to have the same sort of representation of life on the screen that we have on the stage. Broadway successes were eagerly sought and bought.

Hollywood had to look around for actors who

could read lines. And immediately Humpty-Dumpty fell off his wall. Screen stars whose names had been great box-office draws as long as they kept their mouths shut, suddenly went overboard, some never to rise again. The few who had stage training, and the even smaller group who set about the painful and uphill job of acquiring it, were, of course, the survivors.

And then began the long trek from Broadway to Hollywood.

Several "old fossils", including Lionel Barrymore and George Arliss, appeared on the screen and the fans gave them quite a hand. Wally Beery, whose profile is something not even his best friend likes to speak about, discovered that he had a voice as well as a way with him.

About this time, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer bought the rights to Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie." Frances Marion was asked to make it into a screen play. From the beginning, she saw me as *Marthy*, the old water-front soak. She built up the part just as she had fattened the part of *Ma Callahan* for me. And again she went to the powers that be and demanded that I be given the rôle.

They were kind but firm.

"My dear child," said one official reasonably, "we must have actors with a following. People whose

names mean something. There is no doubt that Miss Dressler was a great actress in her day. But her day is — past. Nobody has heard of her in ten years."

Not even Frances could contest that final damning statement. But Frances is loyal and she is stubborn. Don't think for a moment, though, that she would have jeopardized a production in the name of friendship. Not Frances Marion. But, you see, she still believed in me. She remembered me as *Ma Callahan*. She had written the part. Don't forget that. My interpretation of the rôle had meant more to her than it could possibly have meant to anybody else.

But Frances is smart. She couldn't be where she is to-day if she weren't.

"Perhaps you're right," she said sweetly. "But just give her a test in the part for my sake. If she fails, my conscience will be clear. I'll feel I've done all I could."

To placate her, they agreed to test me as *Marthy*. They were serene in the confidence that even Frances would see that I was through.

To everybody's surprise, except Frances Marion's, the test came out favorably. And when the picture was shown, it was an enormous success. At once it established Garbo on a throne which in my mind has

never been threatened. She was magnificent. And some of the critics said that an ugly old woman had stolen the show from the beautiful young star!

Of course this was not true. Nobody could steal a show from Garbo. What they meant was this: They were surprised that the part of a homely drunken old water-front hag could be made a thing that pulled at your heartstrings even while you shuddered at the depth of degradation to which *Marthy* had sunk.

I had simply tried to follow a precept which I had long ago laid down for myself: "Play every part as if it were your first and last. Temper the enthusiasm of the novice with the fine restraint of a mature artist . . ."

A good way to play one's rôle on the stage of life! But, as you know, in real life my enthusiasm sometimes outran my sense of proportion.

I remember one very uncomfortable occasion on which I was accused of stealing an off-stage show. It happened a good many years ago, when I was working for the Shuberts in a production starring Alice Delysia, the European sensation Jake Shubert had imported at considerable expense. All at once Jake decided to exploit foreign talent on a large scale. Amid much fanfare and acclaim, he brought over Mistinguet, the French musical-

comedy queen, whose smile and legs were supposed to be equally priceless.

To give their new stars the proper send-off, the Shubert boys flung a big party. Champagne flowed freely and there were plenty of newspaper men present to toast the guest of honor. Jake Shubert had asked me to act as official hostess at the party. I threw myself into my rôle with my usual wholehearted enthusiasm. I had been asked to see that people had a good time and that's what I proceeded to do.

The crowd came, pressed around Mistinguet and Delysia, admired their clothes and their beauty, and returned to me to make them laugh. The party was an enormous success. I was thrilled that I had been able to put things over for Jake. I might have gone away happy if it hadn't occurred to me to hunt Jake up, congratulate him, and, incidentally, collect the bouquet of thanks which I thought was my modest due.

I paused beside a large palm tree to reconnoiter. Jake wasn't in sight, but I could hear his voice on the other side of the palm. He was talking to somebody.

"Great party, Jake," said a voice which I didn't recognize.

"Yeah?" gloomed Jake. " 'Sa rotten party, if you

ask me. Am I trying to put Marie Dressler over? I gave this blow-out for those two foreign beauties of mine, didn't I? And now look at 'em! Look at 'em just once. Nobody knows they're here. Huddled over there in a corner by themselves, while Marie holds the center of the stage with everybody in the place laughing at her fool antics." A whimper of pure anguish escaped Jake. "To think," he moaned, "I should spend five thousand dollars on a party for Marie Dressler!"

I crept away, sadder, but, I fear, no wiser. As I told you in the beginning, I was elected chairman of the entertainment committee at birth, and I can't seem to do anything about it.

Fortunately for me, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer were delighted with the success of "Anna Christie." And I? Well, after ten years on the shelf, how do you think I felt? Letters poured in. People liked me. They wanted to see me again. It didn't matter to the public that I was no longer young. The hurt in my heart was healed.

One of the most interesting things about "Anna Christie" was the chance it gave me to observe Garbo at close range. I made up my mind about her long before we finished the picture and I have had no occasion since to revise my opinion. Garbo is lonely. She always has been and she always will

be. She lives in the core of a vast aching aloneness. She is a great artist, but it is both her supreme glory and her supreme tragedy that art is to her the only reality. The figures of living men and women, the events of everyday existence, move about her, shadowy, unsubstantial. It is only when she breathes the breath of life into a part, clothes with her own flesh and blood the concept of the playwright, that she herself is fully awake, fully alive.

The Garbo myths are legion. One of them I can explode now and forever. It has been whispered, it has even been shouted in certain quarters, that the Swedish star's feet are big and unbeautiful; that the photographers are constantly put to it to keep them out of the foreground, so to speak. The photographers are constantly put to it to keep everybody's feet in their place. I played on the set with Miss Garbo for many weeks and I can assure you that her feet give neither camera men nor Garbo any special concern. She wears, I should guess, about a seven A, and her feet are nicely modeled. Smaller feet would look silly on a girl of her height.

After "Anna Christie", there was never any question about parts for me. Metro put me under contract at once. Our contract is a gentlemen's agreement. I have no written contract; I don't want one. My word is my bond. And so is Metro's.

Chapter

· XVI ·

AND now rôle after rôle and picture followed picture in rapid order. I played successively in "The Girl Said No", "Caught Short", and "Let Us Be Gay", in which Norma Shearer scored one of her earliest talking-picture triumphs. In "Caught Short", I was co-starred with Polly Moran — at that time Metro was playing with the idea of building Polly and me as a comedy team — but it was not until Frances Marion wrote "Min and Bill" that I got a part after my own heart. The moment I read the script, I knew that here was the rôle I had been waiting for all my life. And I was cast to play it opposite Wally Beery, to whose measurement *Bill* was cut just as surely as *Min* was cut to mine.

Min, as you may recall, was the keeper of a wretched dump of a hotel on the water front; *Bill*

was her man. The characters were so rich, so meaty, that we constantly had to guard against the danger of overacting. Hitherto, in working up a rôle, I had first to get my teeth in it, so to speak, and then sort of roll it over and put gravy on it before it was really mine. This time, the part had everything when it was handed to me. I had only to translate Frances Marion's dream into flesh and blood. Wally played *Bill* superbly. As for me, I felt that *Min* was the best job of my career, but I didn't dream when we finished the picture that it was to bring me the biggest honor that had come to me in nearly fifty years of acting.

And then I woke up one fine morning to learn that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences had given my *Min* the award for the best portrayal of a feminine rôle of the year. I think my principal sensation on hearing the news was one of jubilant thanksgiving that Frances Marion's stubborn faith in me was at last vindicated. And, glory be, she had provided the vehicle for that vindication!

I wish I could make you feel what I felt at the dinner which celebrated the distribution of the awards. I sat there and winked back the tears that smarted behind my eyelids; choked back the lump in my throat that threatened to leave me speech-

less. I was so happy that it hurt. I looked down the long banquet table — a table above which gleamed the snowy shirt fronts and bare shoulders of Hollywood's best.

Halfway down on my right, I caught Will Rogers grinning encouragement at me; near by Lionel Barrymore — this was the year his performance in "A Free Soul" won the award for the best masculine role — was blowing his nose with unnecessary vigor, while Billie Burke was frankly crying. Across the table, Frances Marion was smiling a triumphant I-told-you-so smile. People kept getting up, saying things, congratulating me, calling me a success — a star.

Suddenly there was silence. Norma Shearer, slim, lovely, gracious, stood up, thrust back her chair. She made a speech. I remember only that it wound up with the words, "grandest old trouper of them all." Then she put a shining statuette in my hands. It was the Academy award.

This was in 1931. I was sixty years old.

I couldn't tell them what was in my heart that night. I can't tell you now. I was so proud, so humble. It was such a beautiful thing to happen to an old woman. A crown for all the years of suffering and hardship that had gone before!

The next morning, breakfasting late in lazy com-

fort, I picked up the paper. An obscure paragraph caught my eye: "Actress suicide . . . Sixty yesterday, she told her landlady she was too old to start again . . . To be buried in Potter's field. . . ."

Jane dead by her own hand!

I looked back along the highway of the years: Dark, pretty little Jane and big, homely Marie Dressler, dancing together in the pony ballet of a third-rate musical comedy in Kansas City, forty-odd years ago. Jane on Broadway, while Marie was still stalking the provinces. Jane's name in electric lights; Jane's name on everybody's lips. Her dressing room spilling over with flowers. Eager-eyed youths in hansom cabs waiting at the stage door for Jane. In short, Jane young, beautiful, on her confident way up the steep narrow ladder of success.

And now Jane was dead at sixty, a self-confessed failure. And I, Marie Dressler, was alive, with the Academy award of last night standing within reach of my hand. I slip the golden figure into a bureau drawer. I cannot bear to look at it just now.

I think about last night — the costly food. Jane probably starved to death. . . . That dinner, which the waiters took away half-eaten, would have kept her alive a year. The orchids that fill my room this morning would pay for her funeral. Again my eye-

lids burn with tears. But this time they are not tears of happiness. They are tears for the lost hopes and broken promises of youth.

I think of the living men and women of fifty and sixty scattered all over this country. How many are ready to give up? How many are already beaten? For two decades, America has belonged to the very young. Nobody could be quicker than I to demand that youth be given its chance. But it is wasteful and wrong to discount the wisdom of maturity. Only years of living can bring true tenderness, understanding, compassion. The world needs these qualities. It should make a place for them. People who possess them should make a place for themselves. They should refuse to be shelved.

All this talk about people being no good after forty or fifty annoys an old war horse like me. Some of the world's biggest jobs have been done by men who were well past their allotted threescore and ten years. Some of Michelangelo's noblest works were conceived and executed when he was nearing ninety; Tennyson published several vigorous volumes after he was eighty; Gladstone and Palmerston both served as England's prime ministers when they were past eighty while Von Moltke, the famous Prussian general, was active in the councils of his country at ninety. My old friend and fellow

trouper, May Robson, is in sight of seventy, and I predict that her future on the screen will outshine her brilliant past on the stage. She is just beginning to do the rich, mellow work of which she is capable.

I, who know, tell you that life can begin at fifty, — at sixty. It can begin the day before you die, if on that day you learn something that gives you a fresh vision of beauty or service!

After "Min and Bill", I was again teamed with Polly Moran; this time in "Reducing." I have a lively respect for Polly's ability as a comedienne, and, personally, I think her one of the most likable persons alive. None of which prevents me from believing that each of us plays better without the other. I'm pretty sure Polly feels the same way about it.

"Politics", "Emma", a great favorite with me, and "Prosperity" followed "Reducing." Then in a row came three pictures — my last to date — all of which I enjoyed enormously; these were "Dinner at Eight", "Tugboat Annie", and "Her Sweetheart, the Late Christopher Bean." The screen presentation of "Dinner at Eight", brilliant Broadway success, upset a lot of people because it disproved one of the handy little bromides they like to think of as infallible; to wit, that any young and con-

spicuously good-looking actress owes her box-office appeal to her beauty, her pull with some mysterious power-behind-the-scene, to any and everything except her ability to act. It was whispered behind more than one hand that Jean Harlow, Metro's much-advertised platinum menace, was picked for parts that called for more allure than art. And in "Dinner at Eight", she had to throw a bomb in the works by proving that she is a first-rate actress! Her performance as the wife of the hard-boiled, self-made politician played by Wally Beery, belongs in that limited category of things which may with reason be called rare. The plain truth is, she all but ran off with the show!

I began the period of my greatest success on the stage with the rôle of a servant girl, *Tillie*. In the screen version of "The Late Christopher Bean", my most recent picture, I again played a kitchen slavey. I looked forward to the rôle on this account and also because I knew I was to play it opposite Lionel Barrymore. Lionel is not only our first actor, he is also well up near the top of my list of gentlemen.

Perhaps I feel a special sense of kinship with him because, like me, he is a trouper of the old school. He learned his trade in the days when a stage apprenticeship meant gruelling work, even for a scion of the royal house of Barrymore. Like me, too,

Lionel was past fifty before anybody noticed that he was any good on the screen. I have his word for it that he has been in pictures off and on since there were any pictures to be in. He worked for Griffith in the old Biograph days which, I believe, makes his film debut antedate mine by five years. In between bouts with directors, he did some directing himself. And a mighty good director he proved, too. Ask Lawrence Tibbett, whom he directed in "The Rogue Song", and Ruth Chatterton, whose fine work in "Madame X" reflected his interpretative powers. The fact is, Lionel had just about made up his mind that he was cut out to be a director or an artist — once he left the stage flat for four years of painting abroad — when he was offered the part of the brilliant but dissipated lawyer in "A Free Soul." His memorable performance in this picture not only brought him the Academy award, but it established him once and forever as a great actor.

Here was acting that was the epitome of art. And, yet, acting that was as effortless, as natural, as *right* as rain. People said of him in "A Free Soul", "He is perfect in this sort of rôle; he ought always to be cast in a part like this." They said the same thing of him in such widely dissimilar rôles as that of the mad monk in "Rasputin", as

TWO PALS OF THE SCREEN—POLLY MORAN AND MARIE DRESSLER IN "BRINGING UP FATHER"

JIMMY DURANTE, JUST BACK FROM NEW YORK, TELLS MARIE ALL ABOUT THE OLD PLACE

the gentle Kringelein in "Grand Hotel", and as the harassed head of the household in "Her Sweetheart, the Late Christopher Bean."

With Lionel Barrymore on the set, you have to stretch yourself, do better than you thought you could do. I've never played with him that I didn't envy him his consummate art. One thing I envy him in particular is his uncanny ability to lose himself instantly in a character. Most of us have to get up steam before we can throw ourselves into a part. I don't need the wail of violins to urge me to tears, but I confess I do like a few minutes to myself before I am required to weep my heart out on the screen. Not so Lionel. One moment he is chatting pleasantly with a fellow actor; the next he does a vanishing act before your very eyes. The director calls, "Let 'er roll!" and, presto! Barrymore is gone. Another ego has taken possession of his body; another man stands in his shoes, using the eloquent Barrymore voice and the more eloquent Barrymore hands. And yet, the second the camera stops grinding, there Lionel is back again, taking up the conversation where he left it. The change is instant, complete. No acting off the set for him.

He is the gentlest, most considerate person alive. But like most gentle folk who get anywhere in this

world, he has a temper on tap when he needs it. I've never seen him mad, but I'm told that when he gets good and riled, he can put on a cussing act that sends prop boys, hard-boiled directors, and haughty executives alike scuttling for their asbestos ear muffs!

In my opinion, Lionel Barrymore owes his tremendous comeback largely to the fact that he faces life with an open mind. Perhaps you remember that a lot of folks predicted rather freely that talking pictures would not last. "Just a novelty," they said, and dismissed the whole thing with a shrug. Now these doleful prophets were by no means confined to those stars of the silent films with whom the wish might quite easily be father to the thought. A number of important executives, including, if I remember correctly, the president of one of the big studios, publicly said the same thing. This was barely five years ago. All the doubting Thomases were forced to sing a different tune or step out of the procession. To-day, the only actor in the world who could get away with a silent film is Charlie Chaplin. Even Micky Mouse and the Big Bad Wolf must have their "lines."

Yes, it pays to have an open mind.

One of the most open-minded men I know is Will Rogers. He is my favorite philosopher and

one of my favorite humans. His homespun wit, which is the window dressing for one of the keenest minds at large, his soundness and balance, his sense of fair play, and his native kindness, are all essentially American. He is America at her best. That's why we like him so much — we see the best of ourselves in him. Will Rogers probably has more good deed chalked up against his name than anybody you could mention offhand. He is practically the only public figure I know who has kept his hair, his wife, and his sense of humor twenty-five years. And, I might add, he's kept his box-office appeal too. I'd be willing to stake my last dollar that if you took a poll of the five best-loved Americans to-day, you'd find Will Rogers' name leading the list.

Chapter

· XVII ·

STARDOM at sixty!

In many ways this comeback of mine was sweeter than the first big triumph of my youth. There is a vast difference between success at twenty-five and success at sixty. At sixty, nobody envies you. Instead, everybody rejoices generously, sincerely, in your good fortune. Hearing of it is like reading in the papers that more people are living to be a hundred years old. Young folks think, "Life is full of chances if an old woman like that can do things!" Older ones feel hope and courage rise within them again. They tell themselves, "Maybe it isn't too late to try, after all!" Take it from one who has put the ancient bromide to test: *It's never too late.*

You hear a lot of talk about bitter competition and cut-throat tactics of the motion-picture game.

Some of it is undoubtedly true; most of it isn't. The meanness and envy you find in Hollywood can't hold a candle to the bigness and generosity you encounter at every turn. Picture people have been overwhelmingly kind to me. When they gave me the Academy award, Wally Beery, who played *Bill* to my *Min,* was almost as thrilled as I. Wally is that rare creature, a perfectly natural human. If he likes you, he shows it; if he doesn't like you, he shows it. No matter whether he is talking to Mr. Louis B. Mayer himself or the humblest prop boy on the lot, he is exactly the same. There is only one individual for whom he will turn himself wrong side out and this is his little adopted daughter, Gloria.

No, it is never too late to begin living, but it's a pity so many people waste half their time on this earth before they learn that living is supposed to be fun, and that it is a stale, flat, and unprofitable business unless you can manage to put a little zest into it. It's all right to plan your life ten years ahead, as the efficiency experts beg you to do, but don't let them fool you into thinking you can live more than one day at a time. Enjoy the day that is yours. Don't let fear of to-morrow cheat you out of your birthright; and don't be afraid of middle age.

Personally, I believe that the years after fifty should be the richest, the most fruitful and satisfying in one's life, particularly in a woman's life. By the time we hit fifty, we have learned our hardest lessons. We have found out that only a few things are really important. We have learned to take life seriously, but never ourselves. That's the trouble with us females — it's hard for us to learn to take ourselves with a grain of salt.

Too many women feel that when masculine heads no longer turn at their approach, life is over. That is silly. The rapture of first love is fleeting, but the joy of companionship grows and deepens with the years, which makes picking a man at twenty an exciting but hazardous game, — that is, if you expect him to furnish both thrills and companionship. Sometimes I think there would be fewer divorces if we were all allowed two mates and no questions asked: one to love and leave, and the other to grow old with.

I married at twenty, — for thrills. It didn't work out. The thrill soon vanished, and after a year or two, we realized there was no basis for companionship. I didn't try marriage again for fifteen years. This time I got both thrills and companionship; also an incredible amount of joy, compounded largely of sacrifice and serving and suffering. But

I have already said that this chapter in my life belongs to me alone.

It makes me positively ill to see you women who have raised your children settle back and fold your hands in your empty laps. Instead of thinking that the world has ended for you, you should feel that it is beginning anew. Now is the time to do all those things you have regretfully put behind you because of the pressure of family duties. You've done your share for others. First, you lived for your fathers and brothers; then along came husbands and children — all grand institutions and worth any sacrifice, but they don't entitle you to a martyr's crown. There's no sense in pretending that grown-up sons and daughters are still babies and that they need you. They don't. Let them do their own sinking or swimming while you indulge in a little fancy diving.

I know a woman who always longed to be a good musician. As a girl she showed marked talent. Every one predicted a brilliant future for her as a pianist. But just as she turned twenty, along came a good-looking young man with curly red hair and an engaging grin. She said, "Yes, thank you," right away. There followed years of struggling to make both ends meet. And for a long time there was a new baby to help celebrate every wedding

anniversary. Full years and happy ones, but they left no time for practice.

One fine day she woke up to discover that she was fifty. Her children were grown; her gay, handsome red-headed husband was dead. She settled down to living with her married daughters; helping with the grandbabies. Five years of this and she was just "Grandma." Nobody expected her to do anything but mind the youngsters and watch the parade. Then one morning she found she couldn't get out of bed when her eldest telephoned her to come and spend a week with the children while the parents went skylarking. For months she lay flat on her back in a hospital. One day, during a long and tedious convalescence, she amused herself by writing a few bars of music for an old nursery rhyme she had sung to her children. Her doctor saw what she had done. He knew music and music publishers and he persuaded her to let him send her manuscript away. It sold and when it was published it caught on. Before she had left the hospital, rested and well, she had written half a dozen little songs and had orders for that many more.

To-day, I love to drop in to see her. She has a little house of her own and a piano. She plays and studies. At sixty, she is very much alive, very much an individual with interests that leave her no time

"DINNER AT EIGHT"—MISS DRESSLER AND LIONEL BARRYMORE

BILLIE BURKE, MISS DRESSLER AND LIONEL BARRYMORE

for introspection and self-pity. Surrounded by friends who speak her language, every minute is filled with the joy of work and achievement or with the joy of companionship. At middle age, she is setting forth not on the career she longed for as a girl, but on another just as satisfying. Her daughters are enormously proud of her and are always bragging about "Mother's music."

Not every middle-aged woman can fill her life with acting or music, but she can fill it with something absorbing and vitalizing if she tries hard enough. If she has no ambition to do anything else, I recommend a few wild oats. I was too busy in my youth to sow a proper crop, and when I get around to it, I plan to make up for lost time!

Stardom at sixty!

It would be stupid to pretend that I do not love it. The affectionate I-told-you-so's of the faithful few who believed in me when I didn't dare believe in myself; the applause of you who pay out money to see me on the screen . . . It would be equally silly to pretend that it was all handed to me on a silver platter. My friends fought to give me breaks. But I worked like a dog to be ready for those breaks. I worked even harder after I got them. *I had to.*

I'm scared sick every time I step on a set, but

I love to act. More particularly, I love to act before the camera. With its eagle eye on you, you can't skimp or fake. Less than your best isn't good enough. You can't say, "I'll pick up at the matinee to-morrow." It's do or die to-day.

That old one about work not being hard if you love it is a lie, one of the biggest with which we try to drug ourselves. I've worked all my life and there's never been a moment when I would have swapped my job for anybody's else. But I tell you honestly the more you love what you do, the harder it is to do it well enough to get by yourself.

Working before the camera is always exacting, often exhausting. On the screen it all looks so simple, so easy. The silver sheet flows along, disclosing action that seems effortless. That's as it should be, of course. But there's another side to the story. I remember one piece of business in which I had to let a folding bed close up on me. We shot that scene exactly seventeen times before we got a result that satisfied both me and the director. And the last time that bed did its stuff, I was too tired to care whether it ever opened again or not.

Screen work is a thousand times more exacting than stage work. On the stage, you whip yourself up to a performance. In a couple of hours it is over — for better or worse. And from the beginning,

from the very first rehearsal, you treat the thing as a whole. The play is a unit. You see it unroll before you.

Not so on the screen. Maybe you shoot the last scene first. And perhaps one day you are inspired to do a specially good bit of work in a difficult scene, only to find when the rushes are run off that some actor who was working with you was feeling low that day and gave a performance far below his standard. Of course the scene will have to be retaken. And, this time, you may find it impossible to recapture the fine careless rapture of your original interpretation.

Once, after working like mad three days on a couple of scenes, we discovered when the rushes were run that a maid, who came in twice and said not a word, showed in her second entrance a jaw swollen to twice its normal size. An abscessed tooth had acted up between scenes. The thermometer registered ninty-nine in the shade, but we shot the whole business over.

The most gruelling piece of physical labor I ever put in was during the filming of the storm scenes in "Tugboat Annie." One coastwise sailor in the cast told me that in twenty years' experience aboard tramp steamers he had never encountered rougher seas than those manufactured in our studios. They

should have been good. Mr. Mayer spent $30,000 on the dock alone! Able-bodied men were slapped down by waves the script described as mild. There was more than one arm in a sling, and at least one leg in a plaster cast before we got through.

I was able to keep my footing most of the time. Perhaps because I'm used to hard knocks. And right here I want to say that I wouldn't trade the bumps and bruises life has handed me for anything you could name.

"That's all right for you," comes somebody's answer. "You've got something to show for 'em."

True enough. And it would be asinine to pretend that I deserve success above a thousand others who haven't anything but blue spots to show for the hard licks fate has dealt them. Nobody knows better than I the part that friends and luck have played in my life. But there's something else which should not be overlooked: Even if I had failed, I should still have the incomparable satisfaction of knowing that I had tried. To know that one has never really tried — that is the only death.

I do not deny that the rewards of success are sweet.

Money is one of them. As a class, movie actors are perhaps better paid than any other group of workers. No doubt many of us are overpaid. But

there is one little point about which the public is not in a position to know. It is this: A star is lucky if he gets for his own use one third of the salary his employer pays him. Most of us are content if we salvage less than that.

In the first place, once a star's income gets into the higher brackets, approximately half of it is collected by Uncle Sam in income taxes. The agent's commission of ten per cent., plus the salaries of a couple of secretaries to handle the mail, both legitimate and indispensable services, take out another big slice. But all this is just by way of preface. A star must maintain a certain standard of living. And he is always between the devil and the deep blue sea as to what the proper standard is. If he runs a big house, keeps a raft of servants and a fleet of motor cars, he puts on side. If he doesn't, he's a tightwad. In the nature of things, he must undergo a lively and systematic fleecing. Tradesmen charge him top prices for everything. When he travels, he is informed that only the most expensive suites on boats and in hotels are available.

Even fan mail, gauge of box-office value and sweet balm to personal vanity, is not an unmixed joy. One day's mail not long ago brought me requests for $36,000 in cash and "any old clothes you

don't want." The worst of it was, many of these people needed money desperately. A sick husband, a gifted and ambitious child who should not be denied its chance, a mortgage on the family homestead . . . They make me sad, those letters. I do what I can, but there is so much I cannot do.

There is another type of letter that makes me not sad, but just plain mad. It comes from persons who inform me that "under separate cover" they are sending me a new-fangled lawn mower, or an antique rosewood desk once used by George Washington, or six glasses of grape jelly — each and all of which I am cordially invited to keep and send check for same by return mail. Live stock with bill of lading attached finds its way to my door unsolicited. Things must often be recrated. They must always be insured. Otherwise, if anything happened on the homeward journey, I would be held responsible.

But these are all pin pricks. I'm almost ashamed to mention them when I think of those other letters — hundreds of them — which come every day to cheer me and spur me on. Here is one written on the ruled pages of an old notebook. It came from a twenty-year-old girl in a little town in Michigan:

Dear Marie Dressler — Last year my only sister, who was eleven years older than I, died, leaving three small children. Their father is a good man, hard-working, loyal, but totally incapable of providing three growing girls with more than food and clothing and shelter for their bodies . . . nothing for their souls. No imagination, no ambition. They have nobody but me to look to. I had just finished working my way through college when my sister died. I wanted to be a doctor. Four years of study ahead of me. I couldn't earn my way and look after the children, too. I gave up my dream, but I did it grudgingly, in meanness of spirit. There was no glory in my giving. Day by day, my sacrifice was harder, more hateful to me. I had got to the point where I thought I couldn't go on. Then I saw you in "Emma." Things aren't so hard now. I know I can manage. . . .

Another from a boy I saw last in the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington: "Hey, Marie! Do you remember Bill Sykes? I'm the bum soldier whose hand you held the day they said they'd have to saw off the other leg. Say, you and Polly Moran were great in 'Reducing.' I laughed myself cockeyed. How about sending me an autographed photo to brag to the boys about?"

But of the thousands upon thousands of letters

which have come my way during the last five years, there is one that has meant more to me than I can ever tell any one. The letter was very brief and without signature. It said, "Here is a verse written by a man named Keith. I clipped it from a newspaper because it exactly expresses how I feel about you."

The clipping read:

Her face is like a god's come back to life —
A face that shows the pain of mortal man;
And happiness that centuries have known —
A god who speaks as only idols can.

Perhaps she learned the truth when Time was young,
And comes again with Heaven-songs of mirth;
And leaves her god and goddesses alone,
To live with us a little while on earth.

I have spent hours in libraries poring through anthologies of verse, but I have not been able to discover the rest of the writer's name or anything that would give me a clue to his history or work. For more than a year I carried the clipping in the case with my spectacles. When the day seemed long or hard, I took the verse out and read it again. Recently I had the lines engraved on a small silver plaque which fits into my purse. I am never without it, and I should like to carry it with me to my last

VERNOR JAMES ROLFE OF CALIFORNIA AND LOUIS B. MAYER OF THE METRO-
LDWYN-MAYER STUDIOS AT MISS DRESSLER'S 62ND BIRTHDAY PARTY

PRESENTATION OF GOLD MEDAL VOTED MISS DRESSLER BY
A POLL OF SCREEN FANS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

resting place. I hope that some day, somehow, the sender of the verse will know that his tribute was treasured the more because it was so richly undeserved.

Forgive an old woman her vanity, but I had to tell you how much they mean to me, these letters from people all over the world, — people whose faces I wouldn't know, but whose hearts are open books to me. I was thinking of them a while ago when I said that the more you love your work, the harder it is. But, I tell you, I wouldn't swap places — no, nor hats! — with the Queen of England. And I wouldn't trade my one modest house for all of her palaces, either!

All my life, I've longed for a house. One that stayed put. Even as a child, I never lived more than a few months in any one spot. And, of course, a trouper's trunk is her home.

Ever since I can remember I've been saving things to go in a house. Things people have given me. Things I've picked up at junk shops and auctions. One of my dearest treasures is an old crystal lamp I've been carting around for years, — an old-fashioned two-burner oil lamp such as used to stand on grandmother's piano. There isn't a stick of furniture in my house that a man couldn't prop his feet on if he wanted to. A house is a place to

live in; not a place to live for. I like a living room to look a little mauled. I think most men feel the same way about it. I pass this along to wives for what it may be worth.

I put into my house the things I had saved, the things I needed to make me comfortable. It is no decorator's dream, but it is my dream — come true. I had a little walnut love seat. I bought myself a hammer and some tacks and upholstered it myself. It's the nicest piece of sit-down furniture I possess.

I ask to my house the people I like. My faithful colored Mamie now has her husband, Jerry, to help her hector and boss me and make life altogether delightful. Now and then Mamie will clear out of the kitchen and leave the coast to me. Then I tie one of her big snowy aprons about my waist and make my planked steak specialty. Later, there is music or bridge. Or maybe just talk.

In my back garden my mutt dog, Friday, romps with a pedigreed canine aristocrat named Peter. My friends ding-donged me into acquiring Peter. They think Friday is a disgrace. Peter is all right, but I just can't warm to him as I warm to Friday. Friday and I have been through a lot together. We see eye to eye. Friday used to lie at my feet and doze during those two long years that I sat on the veranda

of my hillside house and waited for something to turn up.

I have a car now. A nice big one. I even have a chauffeur. You cannot imagine the feeling of opulence the back of my chaffeur gave me the first time I rode out behind it! The only other time I've ever felt half so grand was Christmas before last, when Marion Davies presented me with a portable dressing room. Rolling about the lot in it makes me feel like the Queen of Sheba, no less!

Oh, yes, they spoil me handsomely out here in Hollywood and I just sit back and lap it up like a cat with her nose in a saucer of cream. When we were filming "Tugboat Annie", we had to be "on location" for several weeks on end. Mr. Mayer sent me snapshots of half a dozen near by houses from which to choose living quarters. I said that any one of them would be fine and added purely in fun that what I really should like would be a little vine-covered cottage we had passed on our way to location. The next thing I knew, there was the cottage with a blue bow of ribbon tied to the handle of the front door and a card which said, "Welcome Home, Marie!" Mr. Mayer had bought it, vines and all, and had had it moved for me.

If I had been twenty, or thirty, or even forty, there would have been trouble in camp over that

vine-covered cottage! Every woman in the film would have demanded one just like it. As it was, they just said, "Isn't the boss sweet to the old thing?"

Yes, it's nice to be sixty!

Chapter

· XVIII ·

I COME now to the end of my story.

Fifty years of ups and downs, of glory and despair, of happiness and grief. Fifty years as a trouper. Fifty years as a human being. A late climax and a happy ending — that is the play that has been my life. As it unfolds before me now in memory, I watch a kaleidoscopic parade of years brimful of living. And the best of it is that the parade still goes on. Each day brings forth precious moments to add to my collection; renewed evidence of friendships I cherish.

Shortly after the Academy award was presented to me, I went to New York for a much-needed holiday. I was driven up Fifth Avenue. The crowds closed in about the car. Friendly faces and kind. But here and there I fancied I could detect a note of stiffness, a suggestion of suspicion. I knew that

there were those who wondered if perhaps Marie's head were not turned just a little; if success hadn't made a difference. It made me a little sad — this feeling of mine. And then something happened to reassure me; to banish forever that sense of a wall between me and those whom I had known and loved when luck was looking the other way.

As we reached Fiftieth Street, a big fellow in a policeman's uniform, with firm pink cheeks and graying hair showing beneath the blue of his official cap, stretched an arm across advancing traffic. Leaning against the window of my car, he beamed, "Hullo, Muree. How's tricks?"

Bless him for his faith in a Marie Dressler in whom good fortune or bad could effect no change!

A few days later, the telephone in my hotel sitting room rang. It was my old friend, Jerome Kern, on the wire. I knew that Jerome had just chalked up to his credit two major musical successes, "Show Boat" and "The Cat 'n' the Fiddle." He had a new show going on to-morrow night. Would I come to the opening? "For old times' sake, Marie. Remember, you sang some of my first tunes. Stuck to me when other folks said I was a flash in the pan!"

My doctor had made me promise to go to bed early, to stay out of crowds and excitement for a while. But I couldn't refuse Jerome. I couldn't deny

myself the pleasure of seeing his opening. I went with another old friend, Jimmy Forbes, who, you recall, tried so long and so hard to get me a job on Broadway when Broadway would have none of me. As Jimmy and I entered the box Jerome had reserved for us, something strange, unprecedented, happened; that great audience rose as one person. Involuntarily I looked about me to see whom they were honoring in this extraordinary fashion. Perhaps the President was present. Jimmy clutched my arm and whispered, "Bow. Do something, Marie! They're saying, 'Hello, Marie, we love you!' "

I was so overcome that, like the old fool I am, I stood there and cried! Nobody seemed to mind. Later, between acts, they crowded into my box . . . old friends and new. Edna Ferber, the novelist, whose "Show Boat" Jerome had turned into a musical show; Anne Morgan, Jack Pearl, Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Jane Cowl, Irving Berlin and his pretty and gifted wife, Ellin Mackay Berlin . . . They were all so kind, so gracious. The memory of that evening will stay with me always.

There are other things that I should like to tell, even at the risk of having you think me a vain, puffed-up old woman. Although I know that no flowers wilt so quickly as those we hand ourselves,

I cannot close this account of those who have befriended me without speaking of the critics. With a single exception which I shall not talk about at this late day, the critics have been more than fair, more than generous to me. Indeed, I cannot speak too feelingly of the debt of gratitude I owe them. Among those who gave me both praise and sound advice in the old days were Acton Davies, who did me more than one good turn, Franklin Fyles, Charles Darnton, William Winter of the *Tribune,* who saw in me the makings of an opera singer, Louis Defoe of the *World,* Crosby and Clapp of Boston, McNally of the *Boston Herald,* Charles Howard of the *Globe,* Alan Dale of the *American,* and Archie Bell of the *Cleveland Press.*

No would-be artist can afford to flout those whose business it is to look for faults. You get praise from those who love you and praise from those who want favors of you. But from the critics you get the truth. Occasionally they are wrong, yes, for they are but human, but they have no ax to grind, and, as a rule, they do not serve petty personal prejudices. Most of the slaps on the wrist they gave me, I earned; some of the slaps on the back I didn't.

Alan Dale, one of the ablest and most impartial critics this country ever had, once paid me a very

TWO PUPPETS OF MISS DRESSLER AND GRETA GARBO
FROM "ANNA CHRISTIE"

high compliment which I didn't in the least deserve. Twenty-five years ago, when Mrs. Fiske was in the heyday of her glory, she had a phenomenal run in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." It happened that at this time I was playing in vaudeville at Proctor's Fifty-Eighth Street Theater. One evening, just before I was to go on, a young man burst into my dressing room and waved a manuscript under my nose. He declared that he had a grand skit for me. I disliked the young man on sight and refused to listen further.

As I was saying a rather peremptory good-by, an old man who had been standing in the shadow by the door stepped forward and lifted his hat in farewell, too. His stooped shoulders and downcast face showed plainly that he was deeply disappointed in the outcome of the interview. Because I couldn't bear his disappointment, I called the young man back and offered to read his manuscript then and there. It was called "Tess of the Vaudevilles", and it was a grand take-off on Mrs. Fiske's current hit. I played it with enormous success. Alan Dale was particularly taken with it and said in his column that he had never seen a more perfect piece of burlesque than the Dressler interpretation of the famous Fiske personality. You can imagine the thrill I got out of that when I tell you

that up to that time I had never seen Mrs. Fiske on the stage!

I got an even bigger thrill a few weeks later, when I saw her at a special matinée of "Tess." After that, I never missed an opportunity to see her. More than anybody I've ever known, Mrs. Fiske had at her finger tips all the hard-won tricks of the actor's trade. With a flutter of her white eyelids she could suggest the tremulous pride of youth; with a single shrug she could evoke the resignation of age. Every gesture, every inflection was informed with understanding and truth. She was sincerity's self. After seeing her that first time, I rushed home and framed the clipping in which Alan Dale had said I caught the spirit of her acting.

This experience taught me something valuable: Let others name the limits of your capabilities. For your own part, refuse to consider limits. "You can't jump over your own shadow" declared an ancient proverb in which too many people put their trust. I don't believe a word of it. On any number of occasions I have done better than it was in me to do, simply because somebody had unlimited faith in me. My directors in Hollywood frequently call on me to do the impossible. In trying not to let them down too hard, I have, I hope,

added to my own stature. George Zukor, "Chuck" Reisner, Sam Wood, Mervyn LeRoy, Clarence Brown, and George Hill — all of them, like the good magicians they are, have pulled out of me something I didn't know was there.

I love the movies and I believe in their future. I love and admire many of the men and women connected with the industry. Indeed, I am deeply in their debt. For these reasons, I wish I could warn those who are responsible for choosing and making our films on one point which with few exceptions they overlook. The point is this: America is essentially a clean-minded nation. You can't doctor filth, gild it with so-called glamour, and thereby make it acceptable to a decent people. Calling dirt realism and license art may fool the public for a while, but eventually America, the long-suffering, will rebel. Mark my word, the time is not far off. The men who make and purvey pictures had best beware, for instead of the freedom to create beauty which they might have enjoyed, they will sweat under a grim censorship which will reduce film fare to tasteless pap. And they will have themselves to thank for it!

You can laugh at our hide-bound American morals all you want to, but that's the way we're made, and, thank God, that's the way we're likely

to remain for some years to come. But we are not as dumb as a lot of folks find it convenient to think us. The sooner producers, professors, and politicians wake up to the fact that the average citizen in this country has about ten times as much native intelligence and appreciation as they give him credit for, the better off they will be. Why on earth the studios are afraid to stake their vast resources on the production of pictures which pin their faith to dramatic value and good dialogue, rather than to worn-out sex stuff and the exploitation of the underworld, nobody can guess. Surely they must have noticed that all our really good films have been overwhelmingly successful in the box office as well as in the press?

If the producer acknowledges no duty to society, let him at least be practical and consider his pocketbook. In the last brutal analysis, he produces pictures for one purpose: to make money. If he will accept a tip from an old trouper who for a full half century has watched America at the business of absorbing its entertainment, he will mend his ways before the churches, the schools, and decent people generally rise up in their might and smite him.

And now it is time to let the curtain fall and dim the lights. The play, ladies and gentlemen, has

had a long run and a good one. For fifty years, I have made you laugh and cry. I hope that I have succeeded in some degree in the task which is my own — of sending you out of the theater washed of bitterness, forgetful of sorrow and trouble. This much I hope I have done for you who have done so much for me.

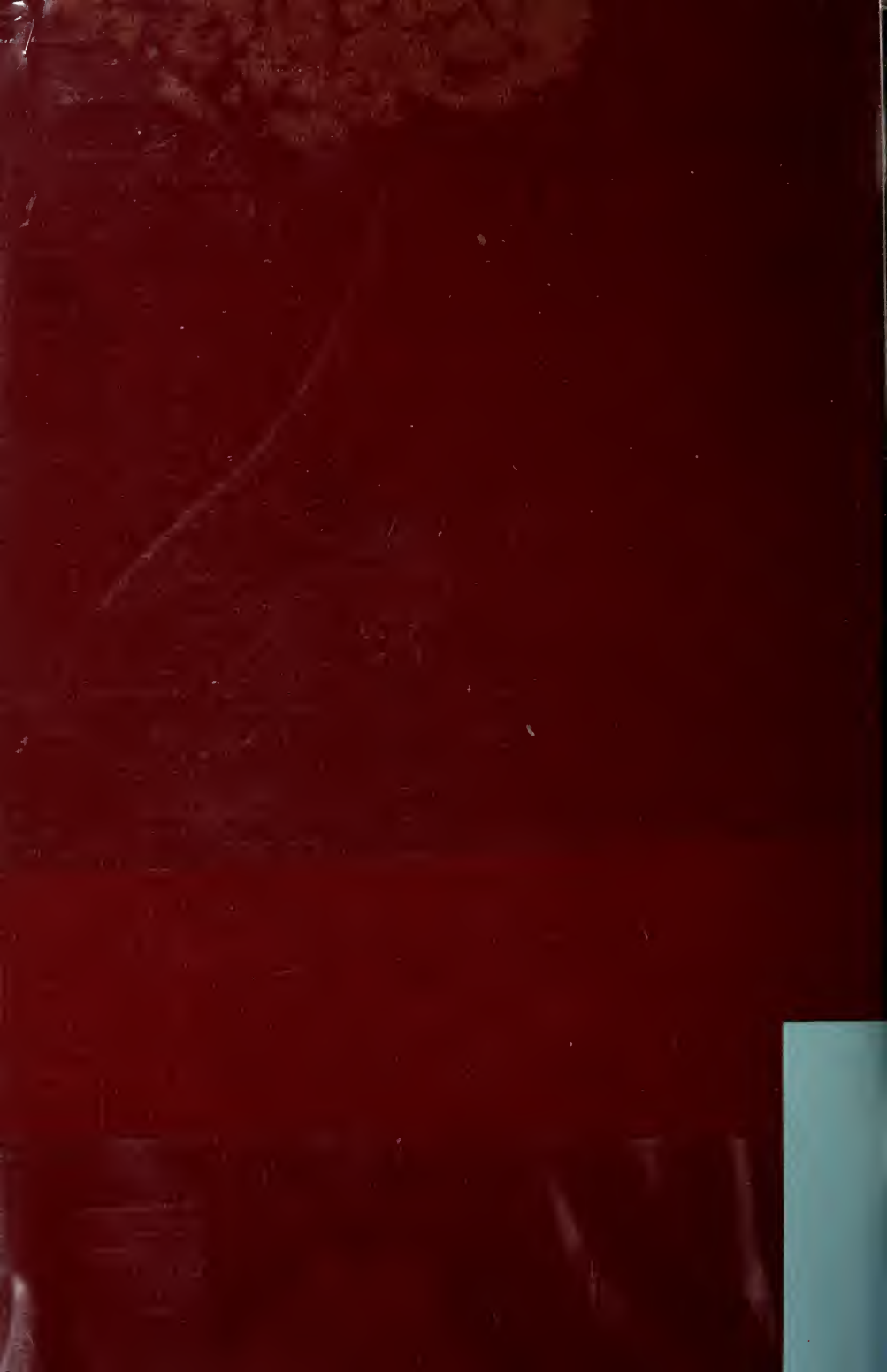
You are my friends, you people on the other side of the footlights. If I have done anything worth while, your laughter and your tears, your encouragement and devotion are responsible. Without you to urge me on, I could have accomplished nothing. Without your quick appreciation, your unfailing loyalty, and your generosity in taking a homely old woman into your hearts, I should never have found the strength to fight on to whatever good fortune has come my way.

What a horde of rich memories enrich me as I glance backward down the corridor of the years! The thousands upon thousands of lines I have memorized — comedy, tragedy, vaudeville skits, the classics, opera scores, all were grist to my mill. The countless pieces of business I have worked out! The costumes I have loved; the costumes I have hated! The men and women who have walked with me from time to time! Ah, a lot of water has run under the bridge since fourteen-year-old Leila von

Koerber defied her father and went away to act on the stage!

Perhaps to-morrow the curtain will go up on a new show — a show with a fresh part and fresh lines for an old trouper. Meanwhile, a full life to look back on and true friends with whom to pass the time of day.

What more could any man or woman ask?

THE END

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